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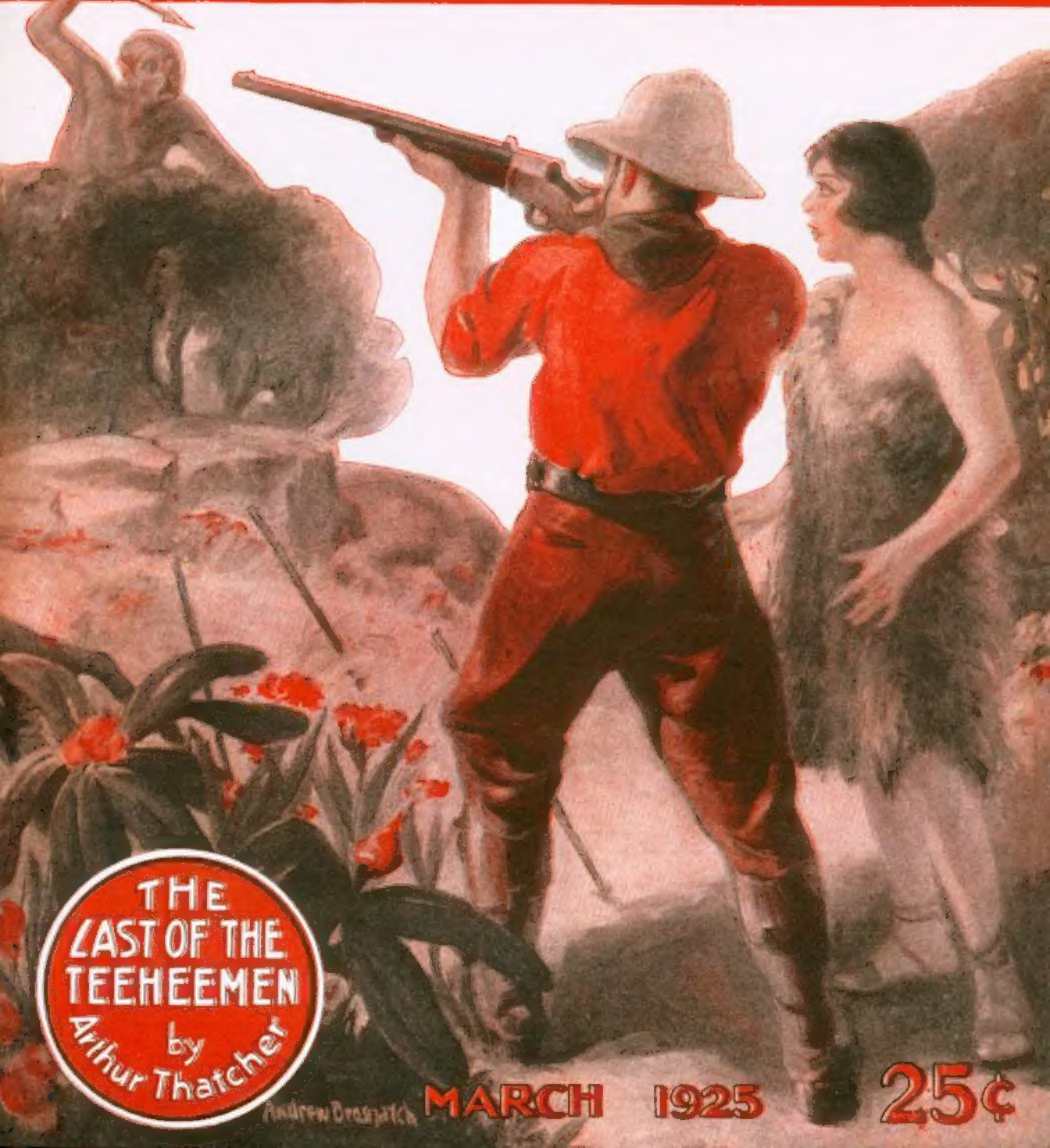

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Andrew Brosnatch

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Author of "The Valley of Teeheemen"

THE giant tiger roused from its slumbers in one of the small thickets that grew in places on the face of the rock-strewn plain that extended toward the distant jungle. It was one of the last of its species in the world. Could a naturalist have surveyed it in safety, he would have classified it as a saber-tooth, a variety generally conceded to be extinct.

Something had disturbed the creature. It raised to its haunches and turned its great yellow eyes toward the jungle. It stared for a time and then resumed its former attitude of ease. For a minute it reclined thus, and then it sprang to all four feet. The long tail switched nervously from side to side. The eyes of the beast fastened now upon what before had been brought to its attention through the sense of smell.

A small procession of men had emerged from the jungle border and was marching toward the wall of the mountain, which upreared its colossal bulk a quarter of a mile from the spot where the tiger had been resting in the thicket. There were seven men in the party. Four were white, and three were natives carrying large packs belonging to the others. The white men also carried a heavy amount of equipment.

"I am willing to stake everything," announced one of the men, pausing and gazing toward the distant wall of rock confronting their progress, "on a bet that we are not far from the entrance that leads through the hollow volcanic mountain into the Valley of Teeheemen."

"Why are you so positive, Holton?" queried Herman Van Otter, the largest man of the party. "What makes you so certain?"

"Simply this," returned the man addressed as Holton, "when you and Benton, with Virginia Hart and the native force sent to accompany us from the city of Teeheemen to the coast, emerged from the exit of the valley through the hollow mountain, I called your attention to five great natural pillars of stone. They were standing at regular intervals and resembled at a distance the ruins of an entrance to some mighty temple."

"I recall that," interrupted Bruce Benton, "now that you speak of it."

"Well," Holton continued, "if you will look far to the right, you will see the same five pillars standing before the mountain wall. The entrance into

the valley must be about a quarter of a mile this side."

The fourth white man of the party spoke.

"Then your land of fable lies just before us beyond the wall of the mountain yonder?" he questioned.

"Yes," Holton replied, "and it is there we may hope to find your daughter if the information you have obtained is correct."

"I hope so, I hope so," returned the other.

THE four white men had come into the far western interior of Brazil on a unique expedition. Since their former experiences five years before in the Valley of Teeheemen, which they were now seeking, they had been widely separated.

Captain Holton had become attached to a special mission sent by the United States government to Russia. While a member of the party he became intimately acquainted with Roderick Sharon, a member of the diplomatic division of the mission.

The latter twenty years before had been left a widower, at the birth of his only daughter, Rosalie Sharon. Upon him had devolved the rearing of the child, and he had accomplished her upbringing with wonderful efficiency. The girl had finished high school in her fourteenth year, and four years later graduated with honors from a state university. She inherited a roving disposition. While accompanying an expedition doing research work in western Brazil, she was kidnaped by a band of savages that attacked the party.

At that time her father was still in Russia. Holton had severed his connection with the mission, and after traveling through various parts of Europe he returned to the United States and settled at Trenton, New Jersey.

Rosalie Sharon was the only member of the research expedition to be carried away. The others returned later to the United States, and it was from them that the girl's father obtained a description of the men who had attacked the party and carried his daughter away into captivity.

A few months prior to the time narrated in the opening, Holton published a story regarding the adventures of himself, Bruce Benton, Herman Van Otter and Virginia Hart in the Valley of Teeheemen in the official publication of one of the national research organizations.

Roderick Sharon saw the article, and the tale aroused another spark of hope in his heart regarding the possibility of again finding his daughter. He had made several trips into the wilds of South America but had returned disheartened from the last one, abandoning all hope of ever finding Rosalie in that great maze of untraveled wilderness. The reading of Holton's article rekindled his hopes. Through the publishers, he located Holton and heard from him the story and description of the men of Teeheemen and the men of Morop.

It was Holton's description of the men of Morop in the article that aroused Sharon's attention, for he declared that the report furnished him by members of the expedition who were with Rosalie when she was kidnaped was very similar. There were also savages of another description with the Morop men.

Sharon had offered a monetary proposition to Holton to accompany him in the search for the Valley of Teeheemen. The latter rejected the offer but agreed to help Sharon. Herman Van Otter was communicated with, and he also welcomed the opportunity to engage in search for adventure in the weird country.

Holton made a trip to the home of Benton in Illinois. Virginia Hart, now the wife of Benton, had agreed to his accompanying the three again into the South American wilds when she

learned the story of Rosalie Sharon's disappearance.

2

THREE weeks had elapsed since the three boarded a United States Shipping Board vessel and started on the trip. Benton, before making the start, had visited the manufacturers of his patent bombs and had brought a dozen of the high power explosives with him. Through the jungle fastnesses and over mountain torrents they had taken their way, until they began arguing that they had about completed their journey to the Valley of Teeheemen.

With the last statement of Sharon, who had joined but little in the conversation during the trip into the interior, the march toward the mountain wall was resumed.

The line of march led straight toward the thicket where the great tiger was waiting. As the seven men approached, the animal slunk into a crouching position. The long tail lashed back and forth at intervals, but the great body remained rigid in its position.

When the party had advanced to within fifty yards of the thicket on the plain, Holton, who was leading the procession, again halted and mopped the sweat from his brow.

"This will be a good place to camp for the night," he suggested. "We can find the opening into the hollow mountain in the morning and make our entrance into the city of Teeheemen tomorrow."

"That's the most sensible thing you have suggested today," laughed Otter. "My feet are as sore as a camel's that has crossed the Sahara."

"This is as good a place as any," said Benton, throwing down his pack and sitting down on a rock near by. The others followed his example.

"We must have fire for the night to cook a bite," remarked Otter after the seven had remained seated for a time. "There's brush aplenty in the thicket yonder."

Suiting his actions to his intentions, Otter left the others and started toward the thicket without his rifle. The great cat drew its ears against its head and prepared for the leap when the man should come close enough.

Otter, walking toward the thicket, suddenly paused as if sensing the danger that lay ahead. A movement of the bush threshed by the great tiger's tail attracted his attention. He began walking backward toward the others, keeping his eyes riveted on the thicket ahead.

Holton noted his actions, and he and Benton were quick to sense that something was wrong. They both grasped their rifles and rose to their feet. As they did so the great tiger rushed in a charge from the brush patch and crouched to leap upon Otter, who had turned and fled from its onslaught.

Holton's rifle cracked as the lustrous body of the great cat came suddenly into view. Benton's weapon spoke at the same time, and the two bullets, finding their marks in different parts of the animal's body, served to halt its onslaught upon the defenseless Otter.

Holton and Benton poured a volley of shots into the beast and the animal, after a wild clawing at the rocks, opened its jaws for the last time in the agony of death.

When its struggles had ceased the men advanced to view their kill.

"A begri!" Benton exclaimed.

"Yes," Holton agreed, "but he's traveling outside of his environment. He must have come through the hollow mountain to this place."

"Hardly possible, if the men of Teeheemen saw him first. He would have been obliged to enter the city some time when the inhabitants were

asleep and the great stone gateway was open."

"The great cat may be a native to this locality as well as the Valley of Teeheemen," suggested Otter, who, having recovered his rifle, had joined the others. "This incident has taught me never to do anything without my rifle handy."

"It's dangerous in this country," agreed Holton. "The land of Teeheemen has always held unexpected dangers, and the contiguous territory may be expected to possess some of the same elements. I obtained a commission from the Smithsonian Institution to obtain all the data possible relative to what I believe to be the last teeheemen in the adjacent valley, and to take the remains of the beast to the United States to be mounted, in the event that some of us come in contact with the creature and slay it. I am certain they will also be interested in the remains of this saber-tooth."

"Don't you think your chances are rather small for bagging the teeheemen?" Otter queried. "Might not Gomo and Duros with the weapons we left them when we took our departure from the Valley of Teeheemen five years ago have sought out the great beast and killed it?"

"That is one of the factors that have been worrying me. If they have done so, and the beast teeheemen is no more, then will I become the laughing stock of the geographic society, for want of sufficient evidence to substantiate my claims regarding the flora and fauna of the Valley of Teeheemen."

SHARON advanced and inspected the giant saber-tooth tiger as the three guides, under Holton's direction, began skinning the great cat.

"This animal also inhabits the Valley of Teeheemen, does it?" he queried, addressing Holton.

Holton nodded.

"Yes," he responded, "and the killing of this one outside of the valley corroborates my argument that we are close to our destination. This creature may have strayed over or through the mountains by some defile unknown to the inhabitants, some route other than the exit through the hollow mountain."

"In such a country, among such beasts and with such natives as have been described to me," said Sharon, shaking his head slowly, "my little girl would have but little chance to survive the past two years."

Sharon walked to a rock some distance from the others and sat staring toward the five stone pillars that had been pointed out by Holton.

Benton approached Holton and the natives, while Otter began to build a fire.

"Poor old Sharon," remarked Benton, indicating the man gazing toward the stone pillars in the distance. "He despairs of the venture's success before we arrive at the land we are seeking."

"He's a pitiful fellow," agreed Holton, assisting in the removal of the skin about the tiger's head.

"What will you do with the tiger's pelt when you have obtained it?" Benton questioned.

"I'm going to treat it with some of the preservative chemicals I have brought and cache it where we can obtain it when we start on our return to the United States."

The skinning of the begri was continued, and when the task was concluded, Otter announced that supper was ready.

The members of the party washed in a small spring stream that issued from one of the rocky crevices in the plain, and were soon seated about the supply of food spread before them on the ground.

"Here's to the land of Teeheemen, the land of great adventure," said Otter, raising a tin cup full of water

to his lips. The others raised their cups in imitation of the speaker and drank the impromptu toast.

3

When the first rays of the next dawn broke above the surrounding forest that led to the rocky plain on which the party had encamped the preceding evening, the members of the expedition arose and began preparations for resuming their journey into the land of Teeheemen.

Breakfast was hurriedly prepared and as hurriedly eaten, for the thoughts of the party were centered in anticipation on the possible events of the near future.

The search for the cavern mouth began, and a half hour's careful examination of the face of the mountain resulted in a joyful shout from Holton, who had assumed the lead of the procession across the rocky wastes that stretched from the base of the mountain range toward the distant forest.

"Here's the place," he called, "but a fall of rock has almost closed the opening. There is no indication that the exit has been used for a long time."

The others arrived at the place where Holton was standing before an opening that receded into the base of the mountain.

"I'll use my flashlight," said Holton, as the expedition started into the cavern's mouth. "We may as well conserve the batteries in as many of them as possible. There may be many dark nights in the Valley of Teeheemen when we shall be glad to use them."

Into the darkness the small procession took its way, Holton throwing the rays of his flashlight upon the rocky floor of the place.

A long march brought them to a point where the gloom began to lighten.

"We are approaching the center of the hollow mountain," Benton explained to Sharon, who was walking by his side. "It is before us that the village of Morop formerly stood."

The party halted at the command of Captain Holton when the light had become sufficient to proceed without the artificial illumination.

"We ought to study the situation before we proceed," he cautioned. "There is no certainty that the tribesmen of Morop's clan may not still inhabit the village of stone huts in the center of the hollow mountain. If they do, we may expect hostilities."

The party proceeded, until it emerged into the center of the mountain, where the cavern spread suddenly to an enormous width. The place was the center of an extinct crater, and the opening in the top was fully a quarter of a mile across.

In the center of the crater floor stood a small village of stone huts.

"There is the city of Morop," said Holton, pointing to the collection of edifices before them. "There are no signs of life about the place."

"A deserted village, apparently," Benton agreed. "We may well keep our rifles in readiness, though it appears that the tribe of Morop no longer inhabits the hollow mountain. Possibly Gomo and Duros exterminated them, following their return from the coast into the valley."

The party advanced to the first hut of the village. The place was deserted. They moved through the one street along which the huts were built, but there was no sign of life.

"There is the place where Virginia was confined by Morop the night I rescued her," Benton remarked, pointing to one of the larger huts the expedition was passing. "The door is open and I'm going to glance inside."

Benton stepped to the open doorway. The other members of the party

followed, but again drew back hurriedly. In the center of the hut was a large skeleton, and coiled about the skeleton was an enormous serpent of a species unknown to the members of the expedition. The reptile was more than two feet in bodily circumference. Its skin was milk-white, and streaked with Y-shaped markings of red.

At the sight of Benton, the reptile reared its head aloft some four feet, its green eyes flashing angrily at the intruder. Its body, some twenty-four feet in length, which had been in a partial coil when the men first approached, began to unwind.

Benton brought his rifle to his shoulder, and Holton and Otter were only a second behind him in discharging their weapons at the head of the threatening monster.

The bullets found their marks, for the snake began striking the interior walls of the hut with violent thrashings of its tail. It struggled from the hut and wriggled in its death agonies into the street of the deserted village.

"We bumped that old creation of a bootlegger's dream off," Otter remarked as the members of the party viewed the great reptile in its dying movements. While the others watched the great snake, Benton and Holton again peered at the skeleton on the floor of the hut.

"All that is left of Morop," Holton remarked as he examined the bullet hole through the great skull. "His people never returned to bury the body of their chieftain. It has remained here for five years, and the hut where he lived has become the lair of a gigantic serpent."

4

BENTON and Holton turned from their inspection of the skeleton of Morop on the floor of the hut and joined the others who were standing near the still writhing serpent in the street. After a further inspection of the reptile, the party resumed its march into the adjoining cavern leading toward the city of Teeheemen and the valley lying beyond.

Following an uneventful march through the gloomy cavern, the opening into the city of Teeheemen was reached. The opening remained the same as it was five years before, when Benton's bomb tore the masonry of the temple of Teeheemen asunder and revealed the secret passage into the mountain, which furnished the only exit from the valley.

The party emerged from the opening and stood looking at the great stone buildings of the city of Teeheemen. There was no visible sign of life in the streets and a deathlike stillness pervaded the place.

Holton turned to the others of the group and announced: "The city of Teeheemen is deserted."

"It has that appearance," Benton agreed. "Let us search some of the buildings. We shall certainly find some of the residents. When we left here five years ago there were at least thirty thousand of them."

The party advanced through the broken wall of the temple and proceeded along the winding corridors that led through various rooms and courts of the place. They entered the sacrificial room and stood listening to the roar of the water receding into the bowels of the earth a few yards from the white stone altar. The place was deserted. Benton advanced toward the altar. As he approached the spot, a reptile similar to the one killed in the hut of Morop in the hollow mountain suddenly reared its head from the top of the altar, where it had been sleeping unobserved by the members of the expedition, as the milklike pigmentation of its skin blended with the coloration of the stones from which the altar was fashioned, forming a perfect protective resemblance. The weapons of the

men again spoke, and the writhing white snake unwound its coils from about the altar in the agonies of death.

The reports of the rifles reverberated through the adjoining corridors of the deserted temple.

"That ought to attract the attention of any residents who may still be here," Otter remarked.

"Strange that we never observed any of the reptiles during our former visit here," said Holton.

"There were great stretches of the country that we never saw," said Benton. "Since the city has been deserted, the reptiles have come into possession. What has become of the people of Duros and Gomo? Could they have migrated into the lands of the world outside of the Valley of Teeheemen?"

Holton shook his head.

"It is a great mystery that a race of people should abandon their city and suddenly take their departure. There was some reason, but what it could have been I cannot even suggest."

The attention of the party was quickly directed from the writhing snake to a roar from one of the adjoining corridors. The noise was occasioned by the flight of birds whose wings were fanning the air of the place with great velocity. Three of the creatures flew from one of the corridors into the sacrificial chamber. Benton fired at one of the great birds, which was larger than an eagle. Its head was as large as a croquet ball, and about as spherical. A short, powerful beak protruded from the ball-shaped head at a point between the eyes, which were set in the forefront of the creature's skull. Benton's shot missed.

Holton fired at the three, and one of them fell to the floor of the chamber, where it gave vent to a succession of rapid, shrieking cries. The other two birds flapped their way into the corridor again and joined with scores of others of their kind in answering the weird shrieking of their wounded companion on the floor of the sacrificial chamber.

Holton fired a second shot through the head of the bird, and the members of the party gathered about and observed the creature. Its wings were about six feet from tip to tip, and instead of being feathered were covered with a skinlike formation much after the nature of the common bat.

"The city of Teeheemen is certainly without human inhabitants," Holton remarked, "or such creatures as these would never be in evidence."

"And if it is deserted, as is probable," Benton conjectured, "the chances for bagging the last of the teeheemen will undoubtedly be first class, for this city must have been abandoned almost immediately following our departure from the valley five years ago."

"True," Holton agreed, "but poor old Rod's daughter is not in the Valley of Teeheemen."

Sharon, while the other members of the party were viewing the ball-headed bird, had remained studying the construction of the sacrificial chamber near the altar, where the white serpent still coiled and uncoiled in the death throes so slowly communicated to its entire body.

The wanderings through the temple were continued, until the men stood at the front exit leading into one of the deserted streets. They emerged into the sunshine again and walked through the streets. Other buildings were entered. The same quiet and lack of evidence of human occupation were encountered everywhere. The party, headed by Holton, walked slowly toward the point where King Urlus had lived in his palace of hewn stone. The approach to the place revealed that the grounds about the palace had been unkept for sev-

eral years. The trunks of the great trees which grew in the yard before the structure of the former king, were overgrown with wild vines that had gained a start during the long absence of the ground keepers of former days.

"What have we over there?" suddenly queried Otter, pointing toward a group of trees to the right of the palace. The other members of the group noted at the same time the object that had attracted his attention.

A creature resembling a man or ape in body had run rapidly from the foot of a tree where it had been reclining. With the agility of a monkey it climbed the trunk of another tree and disappeared in the heavy foliage overhead.

"We'll take a look at that boy," suggested Holton, advancing toward the tree into which the creature had disappeared.

As the men advanced, one of the guides suddenly issued a warning call. The shaft of an arrow flitted past the heads of Benton and Otter and lodged in the ground near the feet of Sharon.

Holton raised his rifle and fired at the point in the foliage where he had noticed the arrow emerge. A heavy body came tumbling from the branches, and finally fell to the earth, where, after a few convulsive shudders, it remained motionless.

"Don't advance too quickly," Benton advised. "There may be others of his kind in the same tree."

The group stood studying the situation for a few minutes and then advanced to inspect the animal that Holton had brought down with his lucky shot. Exclamations of astonishment burst from the members of the party when they paused by the object stretched on the ground.

"Would you call this a human?" asked Holton, turning to Benton.

"It doesn't appear so, though it is a biped and walks and runs upright," Benton replied. "It has an order of intelligence, for it has fashioned a bow and shot at us when we approached the place in which it sought to hide away. On its feet, you observe, are three toes exactly like those of a human being. The place where the big toe and the little toe should be are occupied by powerful claws like a bear's. The same is true of the hands. There are three middle fingers and two outer claws in place of the thumb and small finger on each hand."

"That explains the ability to climb the way he did," interposed Otter. "His face looks more like a bulldog, only the hair is lacking, and instead of the bulldog's ears, he has ears shaped like those of a human being."

"This may be the clue to an explanation of the deserted city of Teeheemen," Holton suggested.

Sharon, who had taken no part in the conversation, approached closely to the creature lying on the ground. He examined it minutely, bending down and taking hold of one of the claws growing where the normal finger should appear. When he arose from the position, his expression had changed.

"Gentlemen," he said, in great excitement, "this creature answers the description furnished to me of some of the savages who carried away my daughter in the wilds of this country. The description was that of men with faces resembling bulldogs and having the ears of human beings. As to the hands and feet there was no description furnished."

"I am going to preserve these hands and feet," Holton remarked, drawing his knife. "I have a powder in one of the packs that will dry them and keep them perfectly."

Holton began removing the hands and feet, and after completing the work he packed the articles in the preservative and added them to one of the packs carried by the guides.

Holton had just completed his unpleasant task when the air was filled with wild cries. From the trees in the palace grounds, scores of the dog-faced savages dropped to the earth, and brandishing bows and spears, bore down upon the members of the expedition.

5

"THE woods are full of them!" Otter exclaimed, bringing his rifle to his shoulder and opening fire. Benton, Holton and Sharon imitated his example, and a dozen of the creatures went down before the rush toward the members of the expedition was halted.

The white men ceased firing for a moment until they saw the savages again start to advance, when they reopened fire. After a half dozen more of the dog men went down, the remainder turned and fled from the garden of the palace along the streets approaching the place from the opposite direction.

"We never saw anybody like that here," remarked Otter, refilling the magazine of his rifle, "when we were enjoying our last pleasure trip in this locality. They won't be eager to taste bullets again for a time."

"We may expect to be bothered from time to time by such creatures," Holton remarked. "If it were not my desire to seek farther for Sharon's daughter, I would be content to leave this place without trying to bag the remaining teeheemen if it still lives here. Such creatures as we have just encountered may drop upon us by hundreds from any of the forest fastnesses, which we shall be obliged to penetrate in our quest for the beast teeheemen. They can overpower us by sheer numbers and take us into captivity or butcher us, as they may see fit."

With the departure of the dog-faced men, the members of the expedition resumed their travel through the streets toward the outer wall enclosing the deserted city.

The entrance was arrived at and the stone sliding gate was half open. Through the passage the party filed and marched toward the river that flowed into the city. Along the banks of the stream they continued until the almost treeless plain was traversed and the edge of the dense jungle was encountered.

"We'll build a nest in the trees tonight after our fashion when first we came to this place," Holton suggested.

The noonday lunch was prepared under one of the great trees near the forest border, and the party, after eating, rested for a time in the shade. After another hour the march through the jungle was resumed.

Late in the afternoon Holton called a halt and suggested that they prepare camp for the night.

"We have no special destination at the present time," he stated, "and no definite object other than to kill the last of the teeheemen and if possible find some trace of Rosalie Sharon. We may as well build us a good nest in one of the big trees and operate from this as a base in our quest for the prehistoric beast. We can make excursions into the surrounding forest and still have reasonable access to the exit from the valley in case things become too threatening from sources as yet unknown.

The members of the party threw their packs to the earth, and the several axes carried by the guides were utilized in preparing material for the nest in one of the trees high above the ground.

A grapevine ladder was prepared by Benton with the assistance of one of the guides, and Otter, after considerable effort, climbed into the tree and fastened one end of the ladder.

"I envy those dog-faced hoodlums their claws when it comes to a job like this," he remarked, as he com-

pleted the task of securing the upper end of the ladder.

The poles for the base of the platform were drawn upward into the tree and placed across two limbs that extended horizontally from the trunk. Upon the base thus fashioned, the other poles were placed and secured in position.

When the platform had been completed, a fire was built at the base of the tree, of dry wood obtained from the surrounding thickets, and the evening repast was prepared. Following a long chat regarding the mysterious disappearance of the people of the city of Teeheemen, the four men and the three guides climbed into the quarters prepared in the great tree.

The moon was at its full and rose above the jungle fastnesses shortly after the members of the party had retired to the platform. Holton was just dozing off when an unearthly bellow reverberated through the jungle, awakening echoes from the far-away hills of the plain. Holton rose from his reclining position, and the other members also sat up. Again the great beast of the jungle called.

"Teeheemen," said Holton. "The god of old Walum and Urlus has survived his worshipers. The beast still lives, and I may get the chance to take his carcass to the United States."

"And he hasn't lost any of his singing ability," Otter added.

A silence ensued for a space of five minutes. There was a heavy movement in the jungle thickets below as a great beast crashed through. The men on the platform in the tree peered downward into the recesses of the jungle below, dimly lighted by the moon. A tremendous bellow again sounded, its notes sending the blood of the members of the expedition coursing excitedly through their veins.

"He is calling for his mate, who is no more," Benton suggested.

"I am going to risk a shot at the creature," Holton remarked, pointing his rifle toward the monster dimly outlined in one of the open spaces in the jungle growth below. "I may never get another. A chance hit may bring him down."

The report of Holton's rifle broke the stillness that had ensued following the last call of the jungle beast.

As the crack of the rifle sounded, the creature standing in the dimly lighted thicket below gave a tremendous bellow of anger. It rushed backward and forward in the undergrowth, seeking the enemy that had so suddenly attacked it. Holton fired again and the bullet struck its mark, for the great beast increased its exhibition of anger. It finally decided, in its instinctive mentality, the source from which the attack had come. It rushed with the velocity of a locomotive toward the trunk of the tree in which the platform had been constructed. The impact was terrific, and the great tree was shaken to its topmost branches. Again and again the monster charged the tree, its attacks threatening to dislodge the men on the platform. They were obliged to cling to overhanging branches to maintain their positions in safety.

Finding its attack futile, the monster finally desisted, and roaring tremendously it raced through the thickets and disappeared into the jungle fastnesses.

"That may be my last chance to kill the creature," Holton lamented.

"I'm not sorry if it is," Otter remarked, taking a survey of the condition of the platform. "That devil nearly dislodged all of the poles in this roost, and us with them."

"Your first shot apparently stung him," said Benton. "Your second only added to his rage."

6

THE next morning, the party, following breakfast, took up a line of exploration that brought them to the River of Teeheemen. They followed the river, which at this point flowed between two lines of bluffs. When they arrived at the stream, the men stood at the edge and peered down at the water racing along its rockbound course some two hundred feet below.

As they continued along the high bank, they suddenly came upon a cultivated area bordering the edge of the river.

"Here is some evidence of civilization!" Holton exclaimed, pointing to the stretch of freshly stirred soil, from which tiny plants were growing at regular intervals. "This resembles the old fields near the deserted city of Teeheemen, when they were in a stage of cultivation five years ago."

"The cultivators must be near at hand," said Benton.

"Look in the distance," Otter commanded, pointing toward a point before them. "There are some of the natives now."

The others looked in the direction indicated by Otter, and observed an unusual sight. A man was hitched to a crude plow, which he was drawing across the field. He was moving toward the party, and two other men were following after the plow.

"Let us secrete ourselves in that thicket there so that we may observe the actions of these people," Holton advised. "They are coming our way."

A closer observation revealed a half dozen other men walking toward the place where the party went into hiding.

Holton turned to the others and in a warning tone remarked, "They are dog-faced men."

"All but the one who is pulling the plow," Benton corrected him. "He is much taller and more powerful than the dog-faced savages."

As Benton spoke, the puller of the plow, who had approached to within a hundred yards of the edge of the field where the members of the party were hiding, stopped. One of the other men close to the plow struck the man hitched to the instrument a blow with the spear he was carrying in his hand.

A tragic drama quickly occurred in the field before the party. As the dog-faced savage struck the large slave, the latter, with a quick movement, grasped the spear as its shaft struck against his back. With a mighty effort he tore the weapon from his dog-faced guard and with one thrust plunged the weapon through the creature's abdomen.

The slave then tore himself loose from the harness of the plow and ran toward the edge of the field and the thicket that adjoined it. His line of retreat led directly toward Holton and his companions. The second slave-driver gave a loud call to the other six men, who had not been observing what was going on. At his call for aid, they ran in swift pursuit of the fleeing slave.

"Give that fellow another spear and he could slay that entire bunch of dog-faces," remarked Otter.

Benton, who had been watching with intense interest, suddenly raised his gun to his shoulder. In the unforgotten language of the men of Teeheemen he loudly called, "Run, Duros, run! We are this way to help you!"

The fugitive heard the voice and was puzzled, fearing apparently a ruse to lead him into some trap. When four rifles spoke almost in unison, he altered his course and sped toward the spot where the rifle smoke rose above the thicket.

As the dog-faced men in pursuit saw four of their number fall lifeless to the earth, the others halted,

stood for an instant irresolute, then fled in the opposite direction, while Duros rushed into the thicket and fell to the earth in the midst of the rescuing party.

"THE white gods are back!" Duros exclaimed, as he arose and extended his hands to Benton and the others.

"Where have you been for the past few years?" asked Holton. "What has become of the people of Teeheemen?"

"Duros will tell the white gods briefly," explained the big olive-colored chieftain; "then we must get away from this locality, for the men of Ugu, the king of the men who were pursuing Duros, will return in great numbers to recapture Duros and the white gods who have helped him to escape.

"The men of Ugu came from, Duros does not know where. They came one night into the city of Teeheemen in multitudes many times larger than the men of Teeheemen. They entered the houses in the night time and seized the people of the city as they lay sleeping, never dreaming of the strange fate that was to befall them. We were carried away as a nation in one night and confined in the caves that are so numerous in the great bluffs that wall in the River of Teeheemen for a number of miles in this locality.

"The people of Ugu are cannibals, and during the past four years they have lived upon the flesh of the captives they took in the city of Teeheemen. We have been kept in the caves or herded in the open plains at times much as the cattle which once you told Duros furnished the most of the meat of the white gods.

"Ten thousand of the men and women of Teeheemen have died in this manner to furnish flesh for the followers of Ugu. The king and his chief captains have sold the flesh of my people to their subjects. Another ten thousand have died as a result of their close confinement in the caves. At present there are not more than five thousand of my people living as slaves and food for the terrible men of Ugu.

"Tell us about Gomo," urged Benton. "Does he still survive?"

"Yes," replied Duros. "The old fellow was sent, like myself, as a slave into the fields. The outdoor life has kept us in good condition."

"Where do the subjects of Ugu live?" queried Otter.

"They inhabit the caves along the river bluffs. Sometimes many thousands of them live in one great cave. The king and his chief captains inhabit one of the greatest caves. In the cave of the king, I have been told, a beautiful woman with a white skin is kept captive. She was brought into the valley by a raiding party that ventured from the valley by the exit from the temple of Teeheemen through the hollow mountain."

"That's your daughter, Sharon!" Holton exclaimed, turning to the quiet man, who did not understand the language in which Duros spoke. "This native tells us that she is confined in a cave by the king of the dog-faced people."

The fighting spirit that had been Sharon's a few years before came back and his hopeless manner changed to excited interest.

"Ask him," he requested, "if he has ever seen her and how she is."

Holton put the questions and Duros shook his head.

"I have never seen her," he replied. "I have learned that such a woman was there from hearing the men of Ugu talk about her. It would be possible for some of us to enter the cave at night and find the place, although the men of Ugu guard her carefully. There are times when they take her into the forest or allow her to walk near the edge of the river."

"If we could discover her at such a time," remarked Benton, "we might rescue her from such a gang. If we knew just where she is confined, what would there be to prevent us from bombing the opening of some of the great caverns where thousands of the dog-faced people are asleep at night? In that manner, we could destroy this nation of cannibals, for they would not be able to regain the outer world, and death would ensue from starvation. In that manner, the people of Duros might be restored to the ownership of the valley and return to the deserted city of Teeheemen."

"We must be moving from here," Otter suddenly warned, pointing toward the fields in the distance.

The others quickly realized the truth of his assertion, for several thousand of the dog-faced men were coming at a rapid pace across the open space.

The members of the expedition retired hurriedly into the edge of the adjoining forest and were soon swallowed up in the dense jungle growth. The march for their camp of the preceding evening was continued until the place was reached.

Upon arrival at the tree where the platform was constructed, a council of war was held. It was agreed that Holton, accompanied by Duros, should go on a reconnoitering expedition that night.

7

When night fell upon the forest, Duros and Holton returned to the place where the former had made his break for liberty.

"The first of the caves is a short walk from here," Duros informed Holton. "Some of them are reached by climbing ladders that have been built to their entrances by the men of Ugu. In the first cave there are confined about five hundred of my people. The entrance is guarded by a number of the enemy. It is my plan to strangle the guard at the mouth of the cave and then dispatch the other guards as they lie sleeping."

The two made their way down the face of one of the cliffs toward the lower banks of the river. When they had gained the lower levels, they followed along the edge of the water until Duros halted close to the face of one of the bluffs that towered several hundred feet into the air.

"The mouth of the first cave is close by," Duros warned in a low voice. "The guard stands at the entrance. Duros will leap upon him."

Holton remained standing, at the admonition of Duros, and the latter slunk away in the shadow of the bluff. The moon was again lighting the valley and the operations of the two were more liable to discovery.

Duros crept to the entrance of the cavern. He paused for a few minutes, breathing softly lest he should attract the attention of the dog-faced savage standing before him. Having satisfied himself that the other guards were asleep within the entrance of the cavern, Duros wriggled carefully toward the back of the savage. With a leap like that of a gigantic cat he sprang upon the guard and throttled him before he could cry out. Duros bore his victim to the earth, and the keen knife with which Holton had furnished him made one deep thrust. Duros did not relinquish his strangle hold until he was satisfied that the savage was incapable of making any outcry. Then he continued to crawl into the cavern. A small fire was burning in the interior and Duros noted the five guards asleep on the floor.

The Teeheemen chieftain grasped the spear which he had taken from the outer guard. With the butt end he crushed the skull of the first sleeping savage. Moving quickly to the second and third he repeated with terrific force his skull-crushing efforts. The

fourth guard stirred as Duros approached him and arose partly to his feet when the point of the spear was thrust through his vitals. The last guard had gained his feet and drew back his spear to ward off the attack of the Teeheemen chief. Duros leapt toward him, and before the spear could be hurled he had caught the wrist of the hand holding the weapon. Again the knife was used with deadly effect.

Duros paused before the barrier of stone that had been constructed across the opening of the cavern to hold the captives back. He hammered and pried at the great stone doorway, but his efforts were insufficient to remove the obstacle. He stole from the place and returned to Holton, where he reported the success of his undertaking thus far.

The two again returned, and with Holton's assistance the stone was released from its groove and partially slipped backward. The two stepped into the cavern, and Holton turned his flashlight into the reeking air of the place. Several hundred men and women were lying on the cavern floor.

The movement of the stone door had disturbed the slumber of a number of the people of Teeheemen and they sat up and turned their haggard eyes wonderingly toward the rays of light that flashed into the place.

"Men of Teeheemen," spoke Duros, "the hour of rescue is here. Arise and take your way to the old city of our existence. Go quietly, except those whom Duros shall select. One of the white gods has returned to assist Duros in giving you your freedom. The other white gods are in the forest and will help to save the others who are still in the prison caves."

Holton stood and watched the emaciated throng of some five hundred leave the cave. Duros selected six of the most powerful. When the others had filed from the cavern, Duros addressed them in a guarded tone.

"Take the weapons of the dead men of Ugu in the outer entrance of the cavern," he ordered. "Tonight we will release from the prison caves the remnant of the men of Teeheemen."

Duros, Holton and the six men left the cavern and made their way to the mouth of the next prison cave. Duros led the attack and throttled the outer guard, while his selected men rushed into the interior and with little difficulty dispatched a dozen guards, who awoke from their slumbers too late to resist the skull-crushing blows from the spear butts.

The stone doorway was removed from the closed areaway and the surprized sleepers within were aroused and told of what was taking place. The cavern was a large one, and nearly a thousand prisoners—men, and many women with children—filed from the foul-smelling place and marched silently toward the distant city of Teeheemen.

Duros, as the throng filed from the inner chamber, selected a dozen of the strongest and armed them with the weapons of the slain guards.

The third prison cave was taken in the same manner as the preceding ones, the best warriors selected and armed with the weapons of the slain guards of the men of Ugu. The fourth and fifth were surprized and taken at the same time. Duros detailed some of the best of the men to go with Holton and locate the cave, and in this manner the release work was speeded up.

In the fields adjoining the bluffs of the river, a long line of fugitives straggled toward the jungle border and through its depths toward the deserted city of Teeheemen. As they went, the men cut poles and began to fashion spear shafts and bows for weapons.

Along the bluffs, the followers of Duros and Holton continued their work of emptying the prison caves.

"The last cavern is some distance from here," Duros explained. "It is the largest yet, and more than a thousand of my people are confined at nights within its depths. To the south of the last prison cavern are hundreds of small caves and the great cavern where King Ugu and his captains hold forth."

The march for the last cavern was begun, and Holton warned Duros that the effort must be made hurriedly, as it would not be a great time until dawn.

The last cavern was reached, and instead of one guard on watch there were three. They sounded a warning as Duros and his followers attacked them. Some twenty-five other guards were stationed in this cave, and they rushed to the aid of the other three. A terrific fight ensued within the recesses of the cavern. The followers of Duros by now numbered more than one hundred. Holton got into the fight with his automatic, fearing that the report of the rifle might be so loud as to carry outside of the cavern depths and arouse others of the sleeping dog men in their near-by caves.

Three of the men of Ugu went to the floor before the shots of Holton's weapon, and Duros with his spear hurled one after another of his assailants into the air from the point of the weapon. The other warriors of Teeheemen disposed of the remainder. The stone door was rolled aside and the prisoners began filing out in silence, following the announcement and warning of Duros. The latter accosted one of the last men to leave the place.

"Where is Gomo?" he asked.

"Gomo has been taken to act as a servant to the white lady in the cavern of King Ugu," replied the man. "The followers of the king have become too lazy to wait upon the white queen, and Gomo was drafted for service."

The man passed on and Duros approached Holton and informed him what the occupant of the prison had told.

"I am in favor of remaining in this locality in hiding," said Holton. "There is a possibility that we may be able to remain in this cavern undetected for twenty-four hours. I understand that the guards have sole charge of the prisons to which they are stationed, and that they take turns in keeping watch at night, but that they never are replaced by others except when they take the prisoners into the fields to work them or herd them in the open air and sunshine. It may be a day before someone discovers what has taken place. By remaining here we might gain the opportunity to view Sharon's daughter as she walks under the guard of the men of Ugu."

"Duros is willing," the native agreed. "We can kill any who enter or pass this place and hide their bodies from view inside this cavern."

The intention of the two men was communicated to the other warriors, and with a brandishing of the spears they had taken from their dead enemies they indicated their willingness to fight with Holton and Duros to the death.

The dawn was near at hand. In another hour the scene was lighted by the first rays of the rising sun. The call of multitudes of aquatic fowls sounded from the river as they rose in flight from the surface of the stream.

For two hours the party remained in the cavern, Duros and Holton keeping a sharp lookout from the entrance. Their attention was directed later to the sound of voices approaching along the bluff from the south in the direction of the caves of the Ugu settlement.

FIVE warriors of the dog-faced tribe were advancing along the edge of the river. They carried several large, woven baskets in which was a supply of fresh fruits. When they arrived opposite the entrance of the cavern, they changed their course and walked toward the opening in the side of the cliff. Duros and his men drew aside and allowed them to enter.

Before the five could retreat from the danger that beset their entrance, their bodies had been pierced by the spears of the men of Teeheemen. Their bodies were dragged into the inner recesses out of view of any others who might seek to enter the place.

"Here's something to satisfy the inner man," Holton remarked as he took some of the fruit from one of the baskets. Duros and the others imitated his example and the company divided the fruit and made their breakfast on it.

Holton had just completed eating the fruit when his attention was again attracted to a company advancing along the edge of the river.

A dozen of the dog-faced guards were accompanying a large man who was carrying a big wicker basket on his shoulder. By his side was walking a slender young woman, who wore a one-piece trapping fashioned from the skin of a tiger. On her feet were skin sandals. Her legs and the upper portions of her body and arms were bare. Her skin was white.

"That is Gomo," announced Duros, who had approached the side of Holton as the latter was viewing the advancing party by the river's edge.

"And that is a white woman with him, the captive daughter of Roderick Sharon!" Holton exclaimed. "We must attack this party and rescue her. My opportunity has come sooner than I dreamed."

Duros communicated their intentions to the other members of the company. They allowed the dog-faced guards, with the white girl and their slave Gomo, to proceed farther down the river before emerging from the cavern to the attack.

Led by Holton and Duros, the entire party charged down the river bank in rapid pursuit of the astonished men of Ugu, who formed a square about their captive and held their spear points forward to resist the assault of the Duros forces.

The attack was carried on with tremendous fury. Duros drew the first blood when he overtook one of the stragglers and hurled his spear completely through the enemy's vitals. Not stopping to wrest the weapon from the flesh of his fallen foe, the Teeheemen chieftain picked up the latter's spear and rushed after the others, who were being led by Holton.

The rifle of Holton began to speak, and one after another of the dog-faced men fell before the warriors of Teeheemen reached them.

Gomo, who had stood by Rosalie Sharon, watched the sudden appearance of the Duros party for a moment; then, quickly comprehending their motive, he discarded his basket, wrested the spear from one of the men of Ugu, and joined in the slaughter.

The assault on the guards of Rosalie Sharon was overwhelming. The girl stood horrified as she viewed the tragic drama enacted before her. When the last of the savage guards had been dispatched, Holton advanced to her and spoke.

"My name is Holton," he explained. "While we are talking, we must be traveling. Let us go from here at once."

The girl followed him and the other warriors hurriedly. As they hastened from the spot, he explained to her how he came to be in the country.

"Your father is in the party, too," he concluded. "He is waiting for you

(*Continued on page* 165)

Author of "Ahri-a of the Caves," "The Ghost-Eater," etc.

TWO more hours to live!

The thought of his approaching death did not seem to cause John Castle much concern. Indeed, he fondled almost lovingly the capsule that contained the deadly drug.

To die—and then to live again!

For countless centuries the wisest men of all lands had vainly sought the secret he possessed. He held the world in the hollow of his hand! Yet he was barely thirty. All the years of middle age stretched ahead in which to enjoy his fame.

On the work-bench before him were the two large glass jars containing the chemicals he had mixed with his own hands. In one corner of the laboratory stood the machine which would transform these chemicals into the life-giving vapor. Upon these inanimate, unfeeling properties he must pin his faith; must launch out upon the Great Adventure dependent upon these alone to prove that his logic was not at fault, that he was really master of eternal life.

He realized, of course, that there was a possibility of failure, and he had laid his plans accordingly. He was carrying life insurance to the amount of ten thousand dollars. The powerful drug the capsule in his hand contained was another of his own formulæ and would leave absolutely no trace that he was a suicide.

The note to Montague White was already written. He knew that he could trust White to carry out his instructions to the letter. He had grown up with "Monty" from knickerbocker days. He held the friendship of this man next only to that of his wife and little ones. Playmates at school; chums in college; pals now. Although the business world had claimed Monty, he still dropped in for an occasional confab with the scientist, and under the latter's tutelage had learned enough of laboratory methods to make Castle feel that he could safely trust the project to him. Besides, the letter explained everything so clearly that it left no loophole for any possible error.

Castle glanced once more at the clock upon the mantelpiece. There was still time for one last test before he died. Not that he feared anything might go wrong, but he felt that he needed the added assurance that such an experiment would give him. After all, it was a momentous step he was about to take.

He wheeled the cumbersome machine from its place in the corner and

connected it to the socket in the chandelier. He measured a small quantity of each of the chemicals from the glass jars and emptied them into the bag-shaped body of the machine. Then he switched on the current and waited until time enough had elapsed to vaporize the chemicals.

He crossed to a crate at the other end of the room, and from it brought the cold, stark body of a guinea pig. Two days before, he had put this animal to death by a small portion of the drug the capsule contained. He wheeled the machine up to the workbench and placed the body of the animal beside it.

Three long rubber tubes dangled from the grotesque machine. John Castle inserted one of these in each of the guinea-pig's nostrils. He gently pried open the little animal's mouth, and placed the end of the third between its teeth. Last of all, he turned the stop-cock that released the vapor, and anxiously watched the result of his experiment.

One minute — two — three—four—five—ah!

His keen eyes detected the scarcely perceptible pulsation of the animal's body as the heart began to beat once more. Stronger and stronger grew the throbbings, till at length, with a tiny frightened squeal, the resurrected guinea pig jumped from the workbench and scurried across the floor.

A hundred times in the last few weeks John Castle had performed this miracle—a hundred different animals had been slaughtered by him and then granted a new lease of life. His was not an idle dream. But one step remained, and that step he was now ready to take: to prove that this same new lease of life could be given to man.

Smiling complacently, John Castle locked the door of the laboratory behind him and made his way to his bedroom. Once there he made his usual preparations for retiring, drew the covers snugly about him and, still smiling, placed the capsule of death between his lips and closed his eyes.

2

John Castle's astral self floated idly over the bed where the lifeless shell that had been his earthly body lay. It was rather an odd sensation, this being freed from the bodily prison one had occupied so long. It was quite an unusual feeling, too, to look at oneself from the viewpoint of an outsider.

So he was dead, at last. He wasn't quite sure that he liked the idea of being dead, after all. Suppose something should go wrong? Suppose the machine should fail to resuscitate him? But then, it could not fail, he assured himself. It was perfect—without a flaw.

He wondered what his wife would do when she awoke, a few hours hence, and found him dead. At the thought of his wife, he found himself transported to her boudoir. As he drifted over the spot where her graceful form lay sleeping, her features lighted with a radiant smile, as if she sensed his presence there.

He sighed as he thought of leaving the children behind, even for a few short hours. Once more the scene changed, this time to the nursery, with its two cribs, where his little boy and girl slept the sweet, innocent, dreamless sleep of childhood.

Locked doors proved no barrier to John Castle in his new form. A sudden desire for one last look at his laboratory, and he was inside. Yes, everything was just as he had left it before embarking on this perilous voyage.

All at once, Castle sensed another occupant of the deserted room, but not a soul could he see. He could feel the presence of someone else by his side. An invisible hand touched his elbow, and a voice spoke into his ear:

"Come, John, it's time we were moving on."

John Castle turned in the direction of the voice. Still he could perceive no one. He felt no fear, only an eery sensation at the novelty of the situation.

"Moving on? Whither? And who are you, to dictate whither I go?"

"Calm yourself, my dear John," the voice returned; "I happen to be appointed to guide you through nebulous infinities to your ultimate eternal goal. You see, John, you no longer direct your own destiny. The physical 'you' has ceased to be."

The newly-dead man felt an irresistible tug at his arm.

He might just as well go along, he reflected; might just as well get the most out of this experience before his invention recalled him to his earthly body. With a last, long, backward glance at the old, familiar surroundings, he drifted through the window-pane and out into the night, the pressure of the invisible hand guiding him as they floated along.

Far up above the earth they made their way, high up into the azure of the clear sky where myriad twinkling stars lighted their path.

As they mounted, ever higher, it was if a veil fell from John Castle's eyes. The air swarmed with astral bodies like his own. He could distinguish men and women from all walks of life—clerks, bankers, laborers, artists, all rubbed elbows in the most cosmopolitan fashion. But what impressed John Castle most forcibly, what made him realize that these were creatures different from those of the sphere he had left behind, was that each and all of the passers-by were as transparent as the glass in his laboratory window. He could see them, know that they were there, yet look directly through them!

He fell to speculating as to the sensation he would create when, after being pronounced dead by the physicians, he would live and breathe once more. He wondered whether, when he should tell them of his findings in the land beyond, they would believe, or scoff at him.

His ethereal companion seemed to read his thoughts.

"John Castle, have you entirely discounted the possibility of failure? Have you never stopped to wonder why other scientists have never succeeded in obtaining the power over life and death you assume you control?"

Failure . . . . assume . . . . slowly, surely, the scientist realized the appalling inference in the specter's words. Was he to fail despite his carefully laid plans? Must he really die and leave behind, forever, all that he loved and cherished? Had he been a fool even to dream of matching his man-made science against the great All-Power who ruled the universe? A wave of bafflement swept over him, a sense of distinct loss, a feeling that he had been cheated. Yes, that was it, exactly—cheated! Just at the moment when fame seemed to be within his grasp, two-score years short of man's allotted span; forced to leave home, wife and children while hundreds, thousands of others with not half his opportunities or interests in life lived to a ripe old age!

Again his ghostly guide divined his mood.

"Have you forgotten that your life was taken by your own hand? However, John, there is no room for discontent in the realm whither we are bound. Just what would you consider fair?"

"I would go back to earth as I had planned and live my life according to my own dictates. No one there would be the wiser—no one knows yet that I have died. Grant me just another twenty years of life, and I would be content to leave the world behind."

John Castle's companion sighed.

"I fear, John, that even then you would not be satisfied. For a good many centuries, now, I have guided souls from earth to eternity, and I have not yet found one who did not protest at severing his connection with the world below. Sometimes we find it necessary to send a soul back to earth for a few more years that he may learn to resign himself to the inevitable. It may be thus with you. But, first of all, you must come with me."

He swerved sharply to the left, and soon they left the hurrying throng of astral wanderers far behind. Both fell silent as they traced their meteoric course, mounting higher and higher till the topmost star gleamed far below them in the vast universe.

John Castle became suddenly conscious of encompassing gloom, an illimitable ocean of inky darkness that engulfed him—a darkness so intense that the blackness hurt his eyes—dark, with the darkness of night; black, with the blackness of purgatory!

A tiny point of light appeared in the center of the black void. Slowly it grew, until it became a bright, spinning ball of golden yellow; larger and larger, till its brightness almost blinded him. The whirling slackened and John Castle discerned figures moving about in the nebulous mass. An unseen, magnetic power drew him into the vortex to join them. As he yielded to this uncontrollable impulse, he heard the voice of the stranger in his ear:

"Behold, John Castle, what Fate holds in store should you return to the land whence you came!"

3

JOHN CASTLE, wild-eyed, staring, let the latest message slip from nerveless fingers to the floor, and crumpled into his desk chair.

God! How his head throbbed! The strain of the past few weeks had been nerve-racking, nerve-breaking. And now it was all over. This was the end. Home, money, reputation, everything swept away in one mighty, colossal upheaval, that left him penniless, ruined!

He wished he were dead! Then he thought of the odd nightmare he had had so many years before. He had never forgotten that dream. He remembered how he had pleaded with the ghostly stranger for a new lease of life—let him think: he had asked for twenty extra years. The time must be nearly up. How he wished the dream had been true, that the ethereal visitor would come now to take him out of his misery.

Well he knew who was responsible for his downfall. It was Montague White—damn his soul!

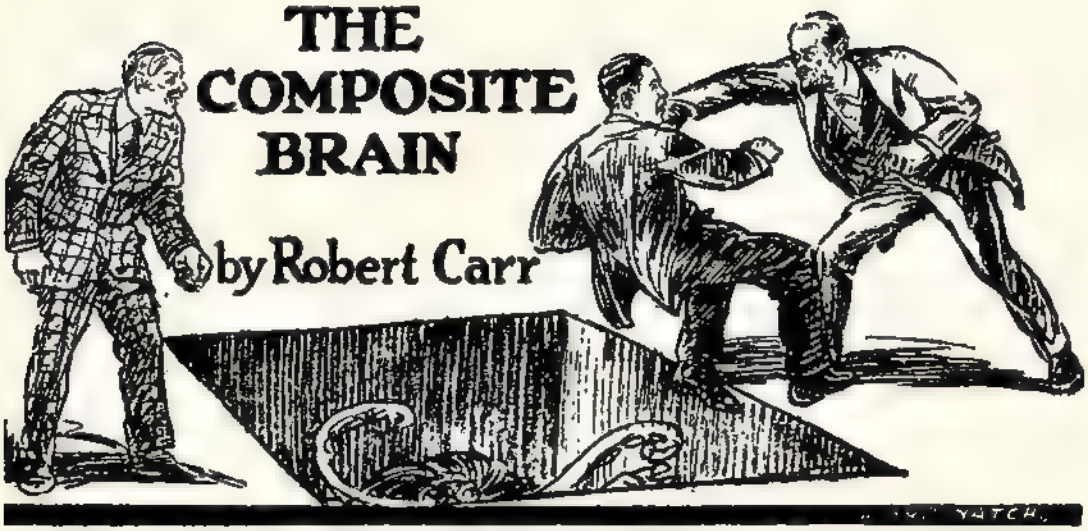
As near as he could remember, that crazy vision of his had been the beginning of it all.

He had always laid that dream to the effect of the drug he had taken. Somehow he had miscalculated the effect of the poison and it had failed to do its work. Then, he was glad; now, he wished it *had* killed him. Dream, vision, whatever it had been, it had so unnerved him that he had been unable to continue his laboratory experiments. His letter to White, the machine itself, he had destroyed.

Then, at his solicitation, White had taken him into his office. They made an ideal team: Castle, the genius, the brains of the combination; White, the doer, the balance wheel. Together they formed an unusually successful pair. In an incredibly short time he found himself a partner in the business. Then came the quarrel. He couldn't even remember what it had been about, but he recollected how he had left the office in a blind rage.

Once alone, he had begun to amass a tremendous fortune. A modern Midas, everything he touched turned to gold. But for every dollar he made

(*Continued on page* 184)



THE COMPOSITE BRAIN

by Robert Carr

PROFESSOR HURLEY leaned forward tensely and added a drop of a sparkling red liquid to the jellylike gray mass in the jar before him. He placed the tips of his long white fingers together and narrowed his eyes to mere slits, while his high, pale, intellectual brow wrinkled in a slight frown as he mused.

His repose was interrupted by the entrance of Leroy, the young student who was studying under him.

"Sorry to bother you, professor, but I wanted to finish that plating test I started this morning."

Leroy eyed the jar on the professor's desk.

"New experiment?" he inquired, lifting his eyebrows quizzically.

"Yes, it is," said the professor. "Sit down, I want to talk to you."

There was a moment of silence as Leroy drew up a chair. Then the professor spoke.

"Leroy, do you believe it possible to make living protoplasm?"

The young man smiled.

"Well, I don't believe it is impossible, but so far no one has done it."

"Suppose someone were to do it. Would that not be wonderful?"

"In the abstract, yes, but I fail to see where it would affect anybody or anything, save the fame of its discoverer. A mass of simple protoplasm would be useless."

"But not if made up into tissues!"

"Now you are talking fantasies, professor, for you know that protoplasm is but the filling, as one might say, of a cell, and must be surrounded by a cell wall and contain a nucleus before it is really active."

"Suppose we could eliminate the nucleus and supply the cell wall; then should we not have living cells to build muscles and tissues with?"

"But would it be possible to do away with the nucleus and to make a cell wall?"

"The mesoglea of a sponge is living tissue, and yet it has no nucleus. You know that such a simple thing as a cell wall *could* be created."

"Exactly what is the point of all this questioning, professor?"

"Only this, Leroy," said the old scientist, leaning eagerly forward with a strange light burning in his pale gray eyes: "in this jar is living protoplasm! Before the night is over it will have formed itself into cells, un-nucleated, imperfect and weak, to be sure, but living cells, nevertheless, which, with proper care, can be developed into living flesh!"

For a moment complete silence reigned in the great laboratory. The last rays of the afternoon sun shone through the tall, barred windows in long, slanting, golden beams, accentuating the gloom within and bringing out the figures of the two men in startling relief. At last Leroy gasped:

"Living flesh? Why, professor, surely that is impossible! The evolution of the single cell to the complex tissue took millions of years!"

"See this?"

The professor took from a drawer the bottle of red liquid he had been using.

"This greatly hastens the development of the protoplasm. Within two weeks we shall have workable tissue, but of course there are many complicated procedures we must go through which will involve some time, but I believe eventually we shall be able to say that we have *chemically created a living organism!*"

"How?" asked the young student, excitedly.

"Leroy," said Professor Hurley, slowly, leaning back in his chair and shaking his head thoughtfully, "men have not yet devised words that can adequately describe what has been revealed to me. By working with me on this discovery, you may learn, but it is too stupendous for mere words. It is the *secret of life itself!* Using chemically constructed tissue as a base, and grafting various organs into it, the possibilities are unlimited."

He took a bit of the gray, semi-transparent substance from the jar and placed it on a microscope slide. The two men bent their heads over the instrument and conversed in low, earnest tones until far into the night.

More than three years later, James Hurley, Professor Hurley's nephew, returning from abroad, bounded up the steps to his uncle's home. The old family servant greeted him at the door and took him to the laboratory where the professor and Leroy were working.

The young man rushed in to greet the kindly old uncle he had known a few years before, but drew back aghast at the white-haired, deathly pale old man with deep-set, burning eyes, who confronted him.

"Why, uncle, have you been sick?" he exclaimed.

"No," replied the old professor in hollow tones, "just working hard on a big experiment."

"You've been working too hard, I'm afraid. What is the experiment?"

"Come with me and I shall show you."

Leroy led the way down into the basement of the big house. He switched on the light and touched a concealed button. A portion of the wall slid slowly and silently back, revealing a dark and sinister-looking cell, or rather pit, for its floor was some eight or ten feet below that of the cellar.

As the three men lined up at the brink, the professor turned on a strong light in the roof of the cell, which illuminated the interior brightly. His nephew gave an exclamation of horror, for there, in the center of the floor of the foul, sweaty pit, was the product of the two scientists' work.

It lay a shapeless mass, clothed in matted, jet-black hair, the kind of hair one sees on sewer spiders. Along the lower parts of its sides protruded two rows of the blotched, gray-green tentacles of the octopus, which dragged limply as the thing rolled slightly on its four short stubby legs.

The face on the stocky, low-hung protuberance that was its head, was a repulsive, hairy mask in which two lidless eyes rolled slowly and hideously from side to side. There was no sign of a nose, while a great, gaping mouth with formidable fangs occupied the entire lower quarter of its face. Its most startling feature was

the pair of naked human arms that protruded from either side of its forward half. Occasionally a low sucking sound escaped it, as it lay in its slime and water like some ancient monster in a subterranean cavern.

For several minutes the men stood silently. Then the professor's nephew burst out:

"Great God! that's a horrible thing! Where did it come from?"

"We made it," replied his uncle.

"Made it?"

"Yes," said the professor. "Several years ago I stumbled upon the secret of making living protoplasm. After a great deal of experimenting, I was able to build up simple flesh, not the complex, nerve-filled flesh you know, but a flesh that contains only a few nerves and the very simplest circulatory system possible. Using this as a base, I grafted various parts of various animals on to it. The creature was constructed exactly as you would build a house, using only what you want and selecting only the sturdiest and most essential things. Lying there it requires but little nourishment, as it moves but seldom. Its heart, transferred alive from a bull, beats about twice a minute when the beast is not active, but is strong enough to force the blood all over its body."

James' horror had by this time lessened enough for him to become interested. "But, uncle," he inquired, "how could you get one kind of blood to nourish organs from different animals?"

"That was simple. I prepared a saline solution that was adaptable to all and was even more life-sustaining than blood, although it requires a stronger heart to pump it. The beef heart in there is the best and strongest that could possibly be obtained."

James looked again at the human arms, showing dead-white against the black hair of the creature, and shuddered to think of the lengths to which his uncle might have gone. The professor continued:

"The simple but efficient digestive system is the best I could construct, and it is protected from injury by a sheathing of strong cartilage. The idea of using the tentacles of an octopus was Leroy's. They are singularly efficient," he added with an evil smile.

"The jaws and teeth are from a monster bulldog, as is also the fore part of the skull. A clever little thought of mine was to graft the poison sacs, ducts and fangs of a huge swamp rattlesnake into the jaws of the living dog, after filling the sacs with a poison of my own manufacture. It is an albuminous poison much the same as the natural venom of the snake, but with much different effect. It paralyzes its victim completely until the antidote is applied, and it has no bad after-effects. As to those arms you eye so fearfully: a late-walking pedestrian obligingly stepped in front of my auto one night in a dark little side street, so I brought him along."

James looked at his uncle askance.

"As I said before," he went on, "there is no highly complicated circulatory or nervous system, but only the trunk nerves to carry the message from the brain to the muscle. There are but few blood vessels. Because of this fact, and because the beast is made up mostly of the lower animals, it has practically no feeling. I could pump a hatful of bullets out of this automatic into it with very little effect. Of course, if one of the trunk nerves or a leader were severed, that part alone would stop functioning; but since there is only one nerve for each part, and those nerves are well covered and protected, you would almost have to chop the creature to bits with an ax before he would die. The sluggish circulation prevents rapid bleeding to death.

"Yes, the body is cleverly enough constructed, but the brain is my masterpiece. Since only the arms of a human being were used, only that part of a human brain that governs the arms was put into my composite brain. So it is with the octopus' tentacles: only the portion of an octopus' brain that controls its tentacles was used.

"Practically all of the bulldog's brain was left in, so the creature has nearly all of the simple instincts of a bulldog, such as use of its jaws, fighting, and avoiding objects when it walks. All of the native pugnacity of a bulldog is present.

"But the most important thing of all is: *this composite brain is controlled by my own!* When I transmit the thought of the action of walking, the beast's brain reacts. When I think killing, it fights with almost inconceivable ferocity and abandon. Remember, I think the action, not the word; in fact, it is nothing more nor less than an extremely simple form of hypnotism, so simple that it is practically thought-transference, for I have no personality to overcome. I have so trained myself that I can direct the thing almost as well as my own body. I will give you a little demonstration."

The professor stood quietly and gazed fixedly at it. Under his direction, it went through various gyrations, snapped its jaws, rolled over, and at length began to climb the opposite wall of the pit.

With a slowness more horrible than speed, it progressed straight up, the tentacles making uncanny little noises on the sweaty walls, while the naked hands in front clutched frantically at little cracks and projections.

Now the thing halted and hung, like a huge spider, directly opposite them. James could see that under the fingernails of the hands the flesh was dead-white, and he knew, without touching the grafted arms, that they were cold with the clammy, creepy cold of a week-old corpse.

The professor's voice broke the silence:

"To show you how complete my power is, I will give the command 'relax'.".

He looked at the hanging body. All holds let go simultaneously and it fell with a terrific thud to the bottom of the pit, where it lay limply, as if dead.

"Now watch!"

Again the professor directed his thought waves at the inert mass. As if touched by a galvanic battery it sprang into action. The professor's nephew realized how immensely powerful the misshapen thing was as it lumbered rapidly about the pit. As it passed beneath him he could see the great thews rolling under the tough hide.

"Could anyone's brain direct it?" he asked.

"Yes, with simple thoughts such as 'relax,' 'move forward' or 'kill'. Another extremely important fact is that I can detect its mental reactions, or, to use the term broadly, read its mind. Of course, its mental processes are very few and simple; in fact, the word 'impression' describes them better than 'thought'. They are very elemental and embrace such subjects as extreme heat or cold, great hunger, and a kind of confusion, met with when the beast encounters a blank wall or an abrupt drop. In this way I can direct it even when it is out of my sight.

"Do not get the impression that it is unconscious except when under the direction of thought waves. It occasionally crawls about in the pit and will fight anything, any time, for the mere pleasure of killing, sometimes coupled with hunger. . . . I wonder what it is thinking about at present?"

(*Continued on page* 171)

A Torture Chamber of the Middle Ages Becomes a Modern Means of Revenge

The IRON LADY *in the* CRYPT

By ZEKE LAKE

FULLY seven feet high does she stand: a woman of studded iron, tall as the tallest giant, and robed as a devout nun of the Sixteenth Century. For more than four hundred years, since she was wrought and hammered into being in the forge of the stout blacksmith Denys, the existence of the Iron Lady has been one of many weird vicissitudes. From the glowing metal did the mighty Denys create her by the order of his liege lord: the Iron Lady, an effigy of the demure nuns of the time, a nun who smiles.

Tourists, visiting that quaint, gray-walled town of the Old World today, and gazing open-mouthed upon the Iron Lady as they harken to her grim history, often wonder why she smiles in such a cruel and cynical fashion. But the Iron Lady, like the Sphinx, only smiles on forever and makes no answer.

It is a somber place for smiling, this dark, cavernous, medieval crypt where the Iron Lady stands, this damp, stone-girt dungeon of creeping shadows, haunted—who will say me nay?—by the phantoms and blood stains of four hundred years. The crypt is peopled by the shades of those who came often, then, of a midnight, with flickering, smoking torches: armed guards and a prisoner who wore fetters. For it was the place of the Question in the ages past—this musty, underground chamber with the stone walls four feet thick, through which the shrillest scream of hapless wretch could never penetrate. . .

All this I knew one night when my spirit was borne back and forth through the centuries on the fearsome wings of nightmare. Like the gaping sightseers of my dream, I wondered why the Iron Lady of the crypt still smiles such a crooked, cynical smile in this Twentieth Century, now that she is only a curio, the gruesome relic of an age that is happily long dead. For, as I beheld her in that horrid vision of my sleep, I knew that her smile, so cruel, so harrowing, was no triumph of the art of the blacksmith of long ago who had created her, but that she actually smiled—evilly, triumphantly—as some cold-blooded human brute of flesh and blood, but lacking bowels, might smile. At least, so it seemed to me.

I wondered why she smiled so, I say. The mystery tormented my waking mind for hours, while I tossed sleeplessly on my pillow. Finally I drifted off again into slumber, and, spanning seas and time, was borne back once more on the wings of nightmare to the Iron Lady in the crypt. In my dreams I saw her once more, and thus I came to know why she smiles. And this is what I saw in my dream. . .

The old caretaker of that museum and crypt is a retiring, taciturn man. It was on a night a month ago when he entered the crypt, bearing a guttering, sickly-rayed lantern, in the dead of the small hours when the establishment was silent and deserted. There was another, a foppishly dressed, evilly handsome man, who chattered volubly with a Parisian accent as he followed with strange eagerness at the caretaker's heels. The scene conjured up again the wraiths of the flickering, smoking torches, and the grim guards, who had escorted countless trembling prisoners down the winding stairway into the crypt in the nights of centuries past.

The caretaker halted in front of the Iron Lady and held the lantern over his head.

"And here is the relic that you were interested in," he commented. "A rather grim and sinister old thing, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

He laughed briefly.

The strange man evinced much interest.

"*Tiens!*" exclaimed he. "What a prize for my collection—could it only be mine! The Lady is not for sale, I know. Yet, gold can do many things."

"Ay, with your fortune," observed the caretaker shrewdly, "I should think that any object which you coveted might readily become yours; ay, any object or thing which you fancied."

He set the lantern down on the rough stone flags of the floor, and the nervous black shadows leapt furtively up from their lurking places in the corners of the crypt.

"Would you care to see the interior?" the caretaker asked.

"With pleasure," replied the other.

The caretaker fumbled in his pocket and produced a heavy, wrought-iron key of ancient design, which he inserted in the keyhole in the front of the Iron Lady, and turned. The old lock creaked, and two divisions of the great figure swung slowly outward with a sharp protest from unused hinges, disclosing a hollow, black interior. It was then, with a chill of horror that caused my body to tense even in the dream, that I fully comprehended for the first time the use for which that monstrous iron effigy had been designed by the gentle rulers of the Middle Ages. For, on the inside of the two hinged halves which constituted the body of the Iron Lady, were many long, slender spikes—cruel and sharp as poniards—which would meet in the center when the figure was closed.

The stranger crowded close and stepped partially inside that he might see the better, the caretaker standing immediately behind him.

"Did you examine these rude handcuffs?" asked the caretaker. "They were used to secure the victim. One passed around the right wrist, like this, so!"—there was a sharp click—"and thus!"—another metallic snap of rusted locks.

"Why, what are you doing?" cried the prisoner in surprize, tugging vainly at the bonds.

"You asked to see the Iron Lady with a view to possibly adding her to your collection, and I am merely giving you a practical demonstration of how she works," quoth the caretaker, stepping back and laughing shortly.

The prisoner joined in with a laugh that died suddenly on his lips, like the yelping of a startled animal.

"Pray release me then, *mon ami;* I have seen enough of her workings."

"Ah, no; the demonstration has yet to be made."

"What the devil! Are you mad? *Ma foi,* but it is a poor idea of a joke,

my good fellow. I request you to release me immediately, and no more of this foolery."

"Yes, I will release you—after I have told you a little story, and completed my demonstration of the workings of the Iron Lady."

All the nooks and crannies of the old crypt echoed to the booming voice, catching up the syllables and flinging them from corner to corner until they were resolved into a thousand whisperings that died as abruptly as they had reverberated into being.

The old caretaker finally continued, with better control of himself:

"You are a man of many *amours*, but of little real love except for your money and yourself, Parisian. Also, you are a swine. That does not matter now, however. I would have you throw your mind back and recall, if you can, one of your many gay, fleeting loves of the years past. She was a simple girl of a Brittany village, was the *petite* Céléstine—aha! you start at the name; you remember Céléstine, then, my gallant Parisian? I see that you do.

"The little Céléstine had hair like spun gold and eyes like great bluebells. But enough. What is it to you, swine of a Parisian? To you, she was but one of your many fleeting loves, the idle pleasure of an idle hour; while to her, you were the materialization of her maiden's dreams, a fairy prince come true. You lured her to Paris; you remember? You lied to her. You abandoned her when she had served her brief turn. And —she died, she and her baby. Ah, you remember, Parisian? . . . And I was her lover in the village: her husband who was to have been."

Followed a long minute, during which the intense silence of the great crypt was more unnerving than ever deafening bedlam could have been. Then the chains rattled harshly as the prisoner moved.

"Her—lover? . . . *Nom de Dieu!* . . . *Nom de Dieu!* . . ."

"Exactly. And I thank the great God for this opportunity of making your acquaintance at last after all these years, Parisian. There could be no justice for such as you, so I am resolved to make my own law and to abide by it. You came here alone tonight in the hope of bribing me to help you steal some of this museum's priceless antiques for your accursed collection. It was a trap I laid for you, Parisian! No man saw you come; no man will see you go. You shall simply disappear from the face of Mother Earth.

"As you may be aware, a swift river flows less than fifty feet from the museum walls. Your body may chance to be picked up by the nets at Vincennes, or it may be swept beyond to the sea: I know not which, nor is it my concern. I only know that this is your wedding night, Parisian. And, since the little Céléstine is dead, I have provided another spouse for you: I have lured you here to marry you to the Iron Lady!"

"In the name of God, mercy! Mercy!"

The caretaker laughed, silently, mirthlessly.

"You perspire; and yet it is not warm," he remarked curiously.

He seated himself while the prisoner raved, threatened, pleaded and wept by turns; but no answer did he make, save to give vent to his silent, mirthless laughter.

Ultimately did the caretaker weary of the exhibition. He arose to his feet and swung one side of the Iron Lady to the front. The slavering, gibbering creature within cringed and shrank shudderingly away as the spikes grazed his side.

"For the sake of the good Christ, forbear!" he moaned.

The caretaker only laughed, silently, mirthlessly.

"She had hair like spun gold and eyes like great bluebells," he murmured, as if to himself.

Slowly he forced the other half of the Iron Lady into position, so that the heavy doors met, and turned the key. The frantic exhortations and insane screamings inside died gradually away, like a phonograph running down and rasping horribly toward the end, until the crypt was strangely quiet again, and all faded away into blackness.

THUS did I come to know why the face of the Iron Lady of the crypt bears such a cynical smile. The name of that quaint Old World town where the museum is located, the name of the caretaker, the name of the unfortunate Parisian—I know not one of them. For I was borne to that place on the wings of nightmare, I say, and saw these things only in that horrid vision of my sleep.

But I will assure you, nevertheless, that the spikes of the Iron Lady, wherever she may be, are rusted a bright, recent crimson—a crimson much too bright for the blood of four hundred years ago. And no one can suspect the truth about the disappearance of the Parisian, for I strongly believe that the Lady is locked fast and her key gone forever—perhaps reposing in the mud at the bottom of that swift river which swirls past the museum walls. And methinks, also, that the fickle Parisian is true, at least, to the Lady whom he married, for, of all the lovers that the Iron Lady has clasped to her heart, not one has ever loved a woman after her.

In WEIRD TALES for April

The LURE *of* ATLANTIS

By

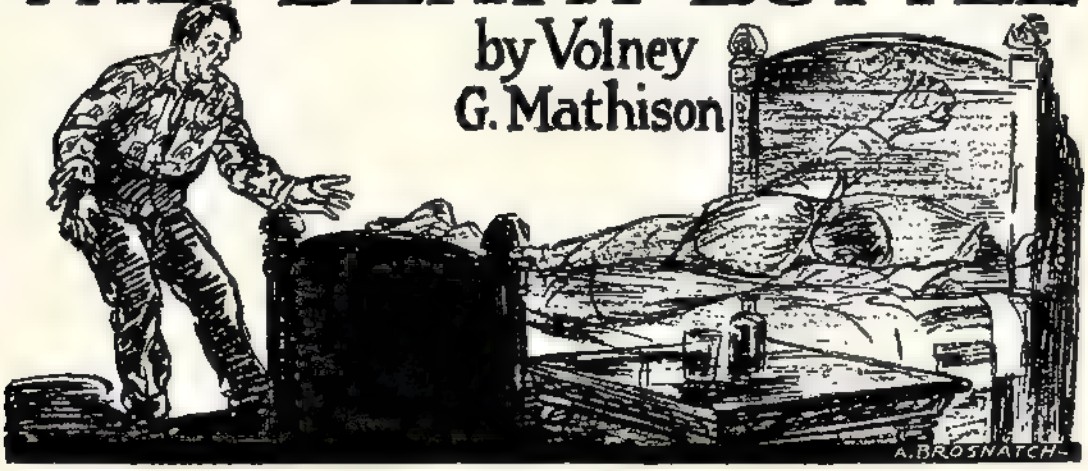
JOEL MARTIN NICHOLS, JR.

At the bottom of the Sargasso Sea it lies, the fabled land of Atlantis; and its living seaweed attacked the vessels described in this fascinating story and dragged them down to the grave of missing ships.

ON SALE EVERYWHERE MARCH FIRST

THE DEATH BOTTLE

by Volney G. Mathison



IN a drunken rage, the master of the three-topmast trading schooner *Eider* had dragged Chortka, his cabin-boy, out on to the vessel's poop-deck; and, for an imaginary delinquency, was beating him cruelly with a rope's end.

Old Andrew Knudsen, owner of the *Eider*, had heard grim rumors of this thing before, but until now he had met with no first-hand evidence of the captain's reported brutality. In an instant, forgetting his avoirdupois and his dangerously weak heart, the famous Alaskan fur-king sprang from the wharf on to the schooner, and grasping the tall, raw-boned young shipmaster by the scruff of his neck, hurled him wrathfully against the taffrail.

"By heaven, sir, to think that you are my son shames me!" choked the old man, strangely white.

"I'm not th' one t' mother your Siwash mongrel!" mouthed the drunken shipmaster, staggering to his feet, his thin face aflame with fury. "Either he goes off this ship—or I do!"

"Then you go off!" burst out Sigurd Knudsen's gray-haired father, panting heavily. "Black Sigurd you are to every Aleut and codfisher in the Shumagin Islands; and you are as black as your name, sir! I've warned you and pleaded with you; I've hoped and waited, and stood for your dirtiness—but this is the end. This adopted boy is a thousand times more comfort to me than you have ever been, Sigurd. I swear to you, sir, that all I own shall be Chortka's. Not a mangy fox-skin do you get!"

"Ha! You're goin' to throw me out for a dirty Siwash snipe, eh!" snarled Sigurd, his dark features hideously distorted by hate and the fusel-oil liquor that ruled him. His eyes gleaming murderously, he lunged at his father and would have clutched at his throat; but the old man, quickly stepping back against the rail, caught up an iron belaying-pin and struck his son a hard blow in the forehead.

Black Sigurd sagged to the deck, stunned. The portly trader, breathing hard and clutching at his breast, would also have fallen had not Chortka leaped quickly to his side and held him.

"My heart!" gasped the old man, dropping the belaying-pin and leaning heavily upon the boy's slim young shoulders. "Help me ashore, son."

The strong and lithe Aleut lad helped his foster-father on to the

wharf and up to the big lonely house in which Andrew Knudsen lived.

"Come back ashore, Chortka," pleaded the old man, as he entered the dark, high-ceilinged living room and seated himself shakily in his black oaken armchair. "I've been lonesome since you went on the schooner; and no good has come of it. You'll never make a friend of Sigurd—much less bring him and me together. Sigurd was born with a blackguard bent—and a blackguard he will die. I knew it long ago;—that's why I adopted you, boy."

"I try one time more, Crosna," replied the comely olive-skinned youth, caressing affectionately the old man's graying temples.

Loving his foster-father with all his simple young heart, and secretly attached to Sigurd, perhaps because he was the old man's son, Chortka still yearned to bridge the chasm that cracked ever wider between these two.

"You are a good boy, Chortka," said the old man, unsteadily patting the boy's slim brown hands; "but he will only beat you and abuse you more than ever, now. Sigurd is my son—but, God help me, he is a scoundrel."

The sea-tanned old trader relapsed into bitter thought; and Chortka slipped quietly from the room. Returning aboard the *Eider*, he found Black Sigurd still lying senseless on the poop, untouched by his ill-treated and indifferent Aleut crew. Lugging the shipmaster down into his bunk, the boy brought hot water and washed and dressed the wound in the temples of the man who had always maltreated him.

And next morning, when Black Sigurd, sick and delirious from the liquor he had drunk and the blow he had received, writhed on the floor of his cabin and frothed like a mad wolf, Chortka took to a fishing-dory and, facing the fourteen wind-swept miles of the Straits of Nagai, fought his way through a blinding November snowstorm to the radio station on Unga Island, where he begged the wireless chief to call in a revenue-cutter, that the ship's doctor might attend the sick man.

Complying with the boy's urgent entreaties, the radio operator picked up the cutter *Sannak* lying at Mershovoi, ninety miles to the westward, and notified her that she was needed at Popoff Island.

Returning to Sand Point, Chortka found Black Sigurd already recovered from his delirium and, except for the gash on his forehead, quite his usual surly and savage self. But still there was need of a doctor at Sand Point; for old Andrew Knudsen was very sick.

The next morning, the trim white revenue-cutter, *Sannak*, dropped anchor in the little rockbound harbor, and Winters, the ship's doctor, came ashore in a motor-launch. As he examined the old man, the medical officer became grave. He took Chortka aside.

"His heart is pretty bad," he told the anxious youth. "He may last for some time, but again he may at any moment have a stroke that will kill him. I have nothing on the *Sannak* that will help him. I can give you a prescription for something that may give him a little relief; but you can't get it filled anywhere nearer than Seward."

"We going to Seward with the *Eider*, Tuesday," replied Chortka, eagerly. "You tell Sigurd to bring it?"

Writing the prescription on a leaf torn from his note-book, Winters sought the master of the *Eider*.

"Will you get this at Seward?" asked the doctor, presenting the slip of paper to the younger man. "It's for your father."

Rising jerkily to his feet, Black Sigurd involuntarily felt his bandaged forehead. He seemed about to

whip out a surly refusal, but something in the uniformed officer's quiet gaze disconcerted him. Muttering a sullen assent, he took the bit of paper from the doctor's hand.

The *Sannak* departed. The next day, two power boats visited Sand Point. In the first was Bull Barney, the islands' supplier of bad moonshine, who came from his mainland still with a fresh supply of his fusel-oil liquor for Sigurd Knudsen. The second boat brought Sourdough Ola, a fox-rancher from Simeonoff Island.

"Ay skall ha' you to git me a few onzes a' strychnin from Seward," he said to Black Sigurd, in explanation of his visit. "Gumboot Hansen ha' seen wolves on Little Koniuji, whur Ay ha' leased t' start anoder fox-farm, an' Ay ha' to poison 'em off, before Ay can move das foxes ofer from Simeonoff. Hyar's fivf tollar to buy das stuff—do you bring it?"

"Come an' have a drink," was the shipmaster's response.

He picked up one of the dark bottles that Bull Barney had left and proffered it to his visitor.

"Ay can't drink das stuff straight," objected Sourdough Ola. "G'a me a glass."

Finding none, Black Sigurd bellowed for Chortka.

"Here, you Siwash rat, fetch a glass so's a white man c'n drink!" he snarled, seeing the boy hesitating in the door of the cabin. Chortka hastily obeyed; but when he brought the tumbler, Black Sigurd dealt him a heavy slap that sent him reeling against the opposite wall. With sharp tears springing in his eyes, the boy stumbled from the room, nursing a bleeding mouth.

That afternoon, one of Andrew Knudsen's power boats towed the *Eider* out of the harbor. Beating down the rock-studded Straits of Nagai, the vessel doubled the southern end of Popoff Island and squared away to the eastward before a fresh southwesterly gale. Arriving at Seward four days later, the little schooner loaded trade goods for the store at Sand Point. In a week the consignment was aboard; and the trim three-master put to sea for the return passage.

Half-way down the Alaskan Peninsula, the *Eider* ran into a gusty early winter hurricane and was forced to beat and drive for two blizzardy days, in a desperate fight to keep off the hungry leeward of Kodiak Island. On the third evening, the gale suddenly blew itself out, leaving the schooner to pitch wearily hour after hour in the trough of a mountain-high sea.

Sick from liquor, Black Sigurd lay tumbling restlessly in his bunk. The empty sails bellied and flapped with nerve-racking reports, and heavy booms slammed against their tackle with maddening monotony: and the wound in the young shipmaster's forehead began to ache with a dull, leaden pain. Savage in his misery and consumed with hatred for him who had dealt that blow, Sigurd Knudsen tossed sleeplessly through the long hours of the night and cursed his father until he was exhausted.

Just when he did at length fall into a fitful drowze, a package stowed on his chart-table broke away from its lashings, and a bottle began to roll around on the cabin floor. His nerves frayed and extremely on edge, Black Sigurd instantly awoke. Lying listening to the rolling bottle until the noise had tormented him to madness, he scrambled out of his bunk and felt his way in the darkness to matches and a candle.

Making a light, the half-crazed shipmaster snatched up the offending object from the floor. It was a large bottle, filled with a clear, colorless liquid. For a moment, Sigurd Knudsen was at a loss, but when, peering at a label on the bottle, he read, "Three tablespoonfuls in a glass of

water at bedtime," he suddenly realized that it was the medicine for his father.

With an infuriated curse, Black Sigurd raised the bottle high above his head and was about to smash it down with all his strength upon his chart-table, but just as he stood with arm upraised, something else caught his eye; and in that fleeting instant there shot through his mind with the flare of a lightning-flash, an idea—a germ of a plan as diabolically terrible as it was uncannily clever.

Protruding from among the packages lashed on the table was another bottle, a large vial with a glass stopper, filled with a white crystalline substance—the strychnin for Sourdough Ola.

Black Sigurd slowly lowered his arm. Steadying himself against the table, he plucked the vial from among its surrounding packages, and looked at it. He himself had used the stuff for poisoning wolves and other four-footed enemies of the young foxes; he had often watched the convulsions and spasms of the victims after they had eaten the tainted meat. He saw with fiendish clearness that if a man with a disordered heart were given such a potion, his death would follow in like fashion—and who would dream that he had not died of his own ailing? Half-consciously, Black Sigurd found himself reflecting that those white grains, dissolved in water, would make a clear liquid, similar in appearance to the heart medicine.

Had his father not vowed to disinherit him? Had he not sworn that Chortka should have all? In his tensely strung state, Sigurd Knudsen saw with the vividness of reality what that meant—the big trading-store at Sand Point; the big sheaf of bonds in the bank at Seward; the rare blue and silver foxes on Bendel and Spectacle Islands, a fortune in themselves; the great somber house in which he was born, and the other buildings; and all the boats—yes, even the spritely schooner beneath his feet! His father had sworn that it all should be Chortka's—and Andrew Knudsen would keep his word.

Black Sigurd had many times thought of ridding himself permanently of the old fur-trader's orphan protegé—but he dared not. With whatever cunning he might bring about Chortka's death, Andrew Knudsen would surely understand; and Black Sigurd would have defeated his own purpose.

Then was he destined to see all his father's goods in the hands of the cursed little Aleut interloper? Should he live to find himself a disinherited pauper, forced to hand-line for codfish in a wet and slimy dory through the raw, misty days of spring, and perhaps crouch beside a moonshine still in a squalid mainland hut during the bitterly cold months of Alaskan winter?

But would he murder his own father?

Wavering, Black Sigurd set down the vial, only to find his thin fingers instantly itching to take it up again; —then the *Eider* lunged dizzily down the side of a high sharp-crested sea and pitched him violently against the wall. He struck squarely upon the wound in his forehead, and ten thousand scintillating daggers of pain flashed before his eyes. Black Sigurd ground his teeth in a frenzy of rage and agony; and his fearful decision was made.

Staggering into the tiny pantry that adjoined his cabin, he uncorked the bottle of medicine and emptied the contents into the sink. Into a pitcher of water he stirred a quantity of the deadly white powder in the vial. Black Sigurd took a pinch of the stuff between his fingers and knew that there was no mistake. It was certainly strychnin. When the terrible potion was made, he filled the medicine bottle with it.

As he started to go out of the pantry, his elbow struck against a flimsy wooden rack filled with dishes, knocking the thing to the deck with a crash that brought Chortka flying from his narrow quarters just off the mess-cabin.

"Get back to your bunk, you brat!" snarled the shipmaster, when he saw the frightened Aleut lad peering through the door at him. "I'm fixing something for my headache."

TWELVE days out from Seward, the *Eider* tacked around the reef-fringed promontory of Mountain Cape, on the outskirts of the Shumagin Islands. Facing a stiff northwester, the swift schooner beat through the night up the Straits of Nagai, passed the lonely twinkling lights of Unga at midnight, and two hours later bore abreast the dark precipices of Squaw Harbor Pinnacle.

To the eastward a cold early morning glow silhouetted the white-mantled ranges of Nagai, while the majestic peaks of Unga Island loomed above the *Eider's* port beam in the snow-breathed dawn, stupendous granite sentinels before the brooding mountain wilderness of the northern mainland. Soon a power boat put out from Sand Point, barking staccato-like in the chill morning air, to bring the schooner in alongside the wharf.

As the Aleut crew worked through the gray forenoon, discharging the cargo of the *Eider*, twice Sigurd Knudsen took the bottle from under his pillow, only to waver each time and put it back. But in the afternoon he saw his father, now somewhat improved, walking on the wharf with an arm thrown affectionately around Chortka's shoulders; and Black Sigurd, under the inflaming influence of a new supply of Bull Barney's liquor, reviewed all his thoughts of the night off Kodiak Island, again picturing himself an outcast and a derelict while the Aleut orphan reveled in his father's estate. His smoldering hatred blazed up with freshened fury.

That night he gave the bottle to Chortka.

"Take this to my father," he told him.

The boy obeyed.

THE next morning Andrew Knudsen was dead.

Russian Mary, the old woman who kept house for him, brought the news down to the *Eider*. Coincidently, the *Sannak* called at Sand Point for fresh water; and in company with the doctor from the revenue-cutter, Sigurd Knudsen went up into his father's house.

They found the old fur-king lying crosswise on his bed, flat on his face, with his hands reaching far out and clutching at the rumpled bedclothes. Black Sigurd's eyes went swiftly to the little table at his father's bedside, and instantly glued themselves upon a familiar bottle. There was a glass and a spoon beside it, and the young shipmaster saw that the bottle had been uncorked and some of its contents used.

"His heart got him," stated Winters, in a matter-of-fact tone, as he turned the body over. "He seems to have gone into extraordinary convulsions before he died." The physician touched the tensely-drawn muscles on the dead man's face, now cold and rigid.

Black Sigurd said nothing. Somewhere within him there was a hard and sarcastic laugh. What fools doctors were!

Andrew Knudsen left no will, and the whole of his great estate passed into the hands of his only son. Black Sigurd's first act was to banish Chortka from the island.

Tying up the *Eider*, the young shipmaster went ashore and lived in his father's big house. Alaskan winter came on, with its storms and bliz-

zards. Black Sigurd, always alone, gradually began to be affected by the gloomy atmosphere of the dark and silent building in which he lurked. Constantly reminded of his crime by his surroundings, he came to find a strange fascination in the room where his father had died, and quite against his will, his feet daily took him into it.

On one of these visits, he espied, wedged between two bureau drawers, a crumpled and partly torn piece of legal paper. Recognizing his father's handwriting on a protruding corner, he dislodged it and smoothed it out. It was a half-completed will; and in its wording it cut off Black Sigurd entirely from the Knudsen estate. The jerky lines showed that it had been written with surging emotion, and the letters grew more irregular toward the end, until they finally became an illegible jumble—then scrawled obliquely across the lower part of the page were the words:

"No—I love my son."

The awful enormity of his crime came to Black Sigurd in a lightning-bolt of realization that rent the winding-sheet of callousness enclosing his corroded soul; those five words flamed in blinding, white-hot letters that burnt him to the very depths of his being. On that day his long-dead conscience was reborn, and from that day he led an existence of horror.

Brooding always over his crime, he lay unnumbered sleepless hours through the long nights of Alaskan December, listening to the fancied voice of his father in the shrieking winter blizzards that swirled fiercely down the mountainsides, rattling at the window-panes like an army of avenging furies and shaking the dark and chilly house as if it were dead marsh reed; while by day he sat watching wispy fantasms dancing outside among the silently falling snowflakes that grew into immense drifts around the warehouses and sheds and made gigantic white ghosts of the island mountains which girded the harbor round.

Black Sigurd tripled his drinking, which only aggravated the ghostly fancies of his imagination. The face of his father, drawn and agonized as it had been in death, haunted him unceasingly, while long-neglected memories of paternal kindnesses in the days of his childhood trooped endlessly through his mind.

Near gone mad, he at length fled from the house. Returning aboard the *Eider,* now become a grotesque goblin-ship of snow and ice, he found less peace than before.

Again and again he watched himself preparing the death potion that night the schooner had rolled and pitched in the Gulf of Alaska; and now, as the northwest winds roared down the Straits of Nagai and drove wild multitudes of white-crested seas into the mouth of the little harbor, the *Eider* chafed unceasingly against the ice-crusted wharf pilings with weird creakings and moanings that banished sleep and gave the man's avenging conscience constant opportunity for torment. His nervous system shattered, he fled back to the cold, dead house ashore, and lived in alternate fits of insanity and hypochondria.

DECEMBER and January dragged by. February came, with still fiercer gales and hurricanes. There was almost no daylight, and what little there was lighted only a dismal world of snow and granite. Black Sigurd's supply of liquor ran out, and since the terrific weather had completely halted inter-island travel, he could get no more. This was a fresh load of torment upon his wrecked nerves. In his weakening mind, he began to hear the dying moans of his father more and more clearly, and sometimes saw his pain-

(*Continued on page* 190)

A Fascinating Tale in Lighter Vein

Adventures of an Astral

By GORDON PHILIP ENGLAND

Author of "The Master of Hell"

WHY mortals cannot be content to remain mortals; why they crave to loose souls from bodies and go wandering about in planes other than their own—these are puzzling questions. Yet many people are subject to such desires, and eagerly consult mediums and magicians, and delve within pages of spiritualistic volumes with the hope of thus realizing their abnormal ambitions.

Did most persons know what I, Edward Grant Thompson, know, or experience what I have experienced, then I feel convinced they would be satisfied to dwell in natural spheres, and not go aimlessly rambling about the universe as star-rovers.

I must admit, however, there is a certain fascination connected with the astralizing process which brings with it very pleasurable sensations. Doubtless this is one reason why so many seek to become proficient in the art, even though it often requires years of arduous study and unswerving determination and perseverance to master it.

But I myself, having been reared by a maiden aunt who continually dipped her bucket in the lore of spiritism, was well versed in occult subjects, and at an early age learned to perform successfully the astralizing act.

Between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six, scarcely a week passed during which I did not astralize myself at least one night. Gradually it became an easy process, for the longer one practises it, the more adept one becomes.

Just before my twenty-sixth birthday, I married. Then my troubles began.

Now I do not wish you to think that my wife was ill-natured, for she was not. Lucetta Greyes, the girl I married, was in every way but one an ideal mate. Yet that single fault was most annoying. Lucetta was strongly opposed to astralizing, and considered all people who dealt in such matters directly allied with demoniac spirits.

Before marriage, I did not tell Lucetta I possessed astralizing power. Had she known, it is unlikely she would have taken me as husband. But she had not, for I had met her at her home in England, far from my native America, and she had had no opportunity to learn in what environment I had been brought up.

Being well acquainted with her views, you can be sure I said little to her upon such subjects prior to our marriage, thinking I should be better able to win her to my beliefs after the ceremony had taken place.

FOR two full months after marriage, I refrained from my secret pleasure. Then the longing to return to an astral state became so intense that I told Lucetta just how matters stood, and entreated her to allow me to instruct her in the psychic art.

The effect of my disclosure was most startling. Upon hearing me state coolly that I, the man she had married, was a frequent visitor to the

spiritual world and an avowed devotee to the cult of spiritism, Lucetta uttered a piercing scream and fell unconscious.

As she dropped upon a soft rug, she received no hurt of body, but her soul had sustained a tremendous shock, and she did not immediately recover from this. Her fainting fit was succeeded by one of hysteria, and I found it necessary to get her a doctor.

My wife was not entirely herself again for several weeks. Indeed, she did not become her former self till she had exacted from me a solemn promise that I never would astralize myself again.

Not till after numerous nerve-racking curtain lectures did Lucetta wring that promise from me. But at last, completely wearied of domestic turmoil, I gave in and took the required oath.

That done, my wife speedily recovered, but the effect upon myself was not so pleasing. Deprived of my pet pleasure, I felt completely miserable. I lost all interest in the earthly world. Even my love for Lucetta began to pale. A thousand times a day I cursed myself for having been so spineless as to allow a woman to overrule me.

Yet, despite all, I kept my promise, though frequently temptation assailed me to disregard it. But though firmly resisting my desires, I became each day more sulky and sullen, making life almost unbearable for my wife.

Often I pleaded with her, begging that she restore my liberty, but she was obdurate.

"I don't care what else you do," she told me finally, "if you don't do that horrid thing you call astralizing —or" (this was an afterthought) "run after other women."

I rolled this speech over in my mind, trying to think of some form of amusement that would make a satisfactory substitute for astralization.

Suddenly an idea shot into my head. Why not try gambling? I never had gambled, but others considered it an enthralling pastime.

"Very well, then," I replied determinedly, "I'm going to Monte Carlo and make the wheel spin!"

To my surprize, Lucetta made no objection to my proposal, the reason being, probably, that her own property, which was considerable, had been secured for her by marriage contract; so, even if I lost my income, she would still have ample for all needs.

Two weeks later saw me at gambler's paradise.

Arrived at the Riviera, I immediately plunged into play, and found roulette even more interesting than I had hoped.

With beginner's luck aiding, I won huge sums. My "system" worked perfectly for a whole week.

Then the wheel of Fortune reversed its action and began favoring the Casino. The result was that my supply of the necessary francs dwindled rapidly and before many days elapsed I woke up from my dream of wealth without a sou.

Possessed with the gambler's belief that as luck had changed once it must surely do so again, I borrowed from a rich Russian with whom I had struck up acquaintance, and recommenced operations. But luck was still on the Casino's side, and I lost all.

This was bad enough, but worse was to follow.

It chanced that the Russian who had backed me also received Fortune's cold shoulder, and found himself, as I was, without cash.

He came to me and imperiously demanded repayment of his loan.

"But, my friend," I reasonably protested, "how can I pay you? I have not a sou! I have not enough to pay my hotel bill! I am stony broke! I am—"

He interrupted rudely.

"Bah!" he unfeelingly remarked, pointing at the well-tailored suit I had on, "you have that, at any rate. Sell it at once and give me the proceeds."

I gasped. It was the last suit I possessed. All others had gone in pawn.

I raised beseeching eyes to my persecutor.

"But it is impossible," I said faintly. "I have no other!"

Then hope dawned. Perhaps the man was only jesting. I put that hope into words.

"You are joking, my friend?" I said, laughing feebly. "You are but jesting, is it not so?"

The Russian scowled.

"Bah!" he growled again; "I've had enough of this nonsense! You've lost my money and must pay! Take off that suit so that I can sell it!"

I entreated; I expostulated—all in vain.

"Now," continued my tyrant, folding the suit and placing it beneath his burly arm, "those also—"

He pointed a stubby finger at my B. V. D's.

Shades of the spirit world! The brute wanted to strip my last shred of decency from me!

"No!" I exclaimed with determination. "No! You shan't have them!"

And I placed myself in an attitude of defense.

The Muscovite stormed; the Muscovite threatened. But I was as immovable as the Rock of Gibraltar. I would not give up my B. V. D's.

At length he understood arguing was useless, and turned toward the door. He stopped at the threshold.

"I'm coming back again," he coldly warned. "and I shall not be alone."

Then he strode away.

As soon as he had left, I went to my door and locked it. Then I sat down to think.

Though the Russian had not told me what his plans were, yet I felt certain of his next move. He would have me arrested.

I had a perfect horror of going to jail. None of my ancestors had ever occupied a prison cell, and I believed they would turn over in their graves at the thought of their descendant being in one. Yet how to prevent the disgrace?

A brain-wave suddenly beat upon me. Why not astralize myself? And then I remembered my promise to Lucetta.

After weighing pros and cons, I decided that even Lucetta would scarcely blame me if I took the only logical way out of my difficulties. It would at least be better than suicide.

Looking out the window, I saw the Russian approaching with two of the Monte Carlo policemen. I must act at once.

The building was fireproof. Hastily divesting myself of B. V. D's., I placed them in the middle of the floor and applied a lighted match. They burned beautifully, soon dissolving to ashes.

"There!" I exclaimed in relief. "He won't get those, anyway!"

Wrapping a blanket about me, I lay down on the bed and began concentrating my will power.

Just then came a thundering rap on the door, followed by the voices of the law, clamoring for entrance. I replied to neither.

Then I heard the Muscovite speak.

"Bah! Why parley with him? Smash open the door!"

"But we've nothing with which to smash," objected the minions of justice.

My persecutor laughed harshly.

"If that's all, I'll get you an ax," he returned, and a moment later I heard his heavy tread echoing along the corridor.

But by now I had bent the inner forces to my will, and after that no sound from outside reached me, as my mind was engrossed with the astraliz-

ing process. Some seconds later, my astral triumphantly sprang out, freed of all bodily chains.

WHAT unique pleasure was then mine! For months I had withheld myself from astral joys because of Lucetta's whim, but now at last, I was at liberty! Forgetting Russian, policemen, and other mortals, I cast off all earthly cares and flitted forth.

I now determined visiting certain countries I had never seen, even when in astral form. Meeting another male astral, I proposed to him that we visit the Andes mountains. Having never been there, he readily agreed.

We crossed the ocean, and sped on toward the Andean range. In an incredibly short time we reached it.

It was delightful there, so we spent several days in the mountains.

On the morning of the twentieth day, an alarming thought rushed upon me. What was happening to my body?

I voiced the question to my companion, who coolly answered:

"Doubtless it's been buried by now. I lost mine five years ago by staying away too long."

"Good Heavens!" I cried. "That would be terrible! Why! What would poor Lucetta think?"

"Who's Lucetta?" inquired my fellow astral curiously.

"My wife."

"Is she good-natured?" he asked, casting a searching glance at me.

"Very," I replied, remembering how readily she had granted me permission to go to Monte Carlo; "very good-natured."

"Well, if that's so, perhaps you'd better go back," remarked my companion thoughtfully. "A married man feels differently about such matters, I presume. I'm a bachelor, myself."

I turned toward Monte Carlo.

"Will you come, too?" I asked.

"I may as well," he agreed.

At that instant, a pretty lady astral floated by. She caught my friend's eye.

"Come to think, though," he murmured apologetically, "I've an important engagement. Afraid I can't come. I may be along later."

Turning his back upon me, he hurried off after the lady, calling:

"Say, Cutie, wait a minute; I want to tell you something". . . .

I never saw him again.

I HASTENED on to Monte Carlo. Entering my room, I looked about for my body. It wasn't visible. But the hotel manager and one of the guests were there, talking about it.

"Yes," the manager said loudly; "if the man's wife hadn't come, the body'd have been buried at the Casino's expense. He lost much money there, and they always look after such little affairs. It's policy to do so, you know."

The guest nodded.

"Yes," he agreed; "that's one way the Casino has won the reputation of being kind."

Then he added abruptly: "The Russian went mad, didn't he?"

The manager caressingly stroked his silky mustache.

"That was the strangest part of the affair," he remarked reminiscently. "Even after knowing the man was dead, he tore about the room looking for something. And when he saw those ashes on the floor he became violent. It took six policemen to remove him. They put him in a madhouse."

I grinned to myself when I heard that.

"Serves the beast right!" I vindictively thought. "He needn't have been such a hog!"

But though all this was interesting, I had not yet learned what they had done with my body. But wait! What was the manager saying?

(*Continued on page* 175)

An Egyptian-Babylonian Story

A Pair of Mummies

By CARLOS G. STRATTON

IS THERE no limit to what thieves will steal? I have heard of their stealing old tin cans, garbage, and even false teeth, and I have a vague idea of how a thief might see some value in any one of these. But I cannot see of what value one mummy could be to a thief; much less two mummies!

I was seated in the spacious, tiled and fountained lobby of an exclusive hotel in Venice, reading a recent issue of the *London Daily Mail.* Casually I glanced over its pages until the following advertisement, buried in an obscure corner beneath the "country estates" and "table waters," arrested my attention:

STOLEN—From the British Museum last night, a pair of mummies. Same are the only extant specimens of the embalming practised in ancient Babylon. £50 reward for evidence leading to their recovery. Apply street entrance near southerly gate. No questions asked.

"That is a queer thing for any one to steal," I remarked showing the advertisement to a thin, elderly man, who sat next to me.

There was an Asiatic air about him that was mysteriously attractive. Nevertheless, he was unmistakably an Englishman. He had a touch, or perhaps it was only a shadow, of the past in his dark, Semitic eyes. The odor about him was musty and prehistoric. I thought, as I looked at him, that he was not far from a mummy himself. He looked out of keeping with the luxurious surroundings, in his dirty, old linen suit, which hung loosely on his spare frame. His hair and whiskers sadly needed the smoothing attention of comb and brush.

The old man piqued my interest. He had a strange air about him, and I have found that people who appear strange usually have strange experiences.

The advertisement about the mummies proved to be the opening that I was looking for to engage him in conversation. It seemed to shock him as he read it. His voice and manner were apparently perturbed, and his tone startled me as he spoke.

"I unearthed those very mummies myself. I carried them to London only a few weeks ago. As a matter of fact, sir, I have just come from London, having delivered them in person to the museum, after a three thousand mile journey with them. They were highly prized, as you can judge from the magnitude of the reward offered."

"Someone must have known of their peculiar value, and planned their theft," I remarked.

"That may be," he nodded.

After a pause in which he would not speak, I continued, "I see that you are a member of the London Psychical Research Society, by the emblem in your lapel. I was taken into membership a few years ago."

He smiled slightly, nodded and said, "You will be interested in my story, then, touching those two mummies, which the press announces have just been stolen."

I told him I would be very glad to hear the story, surmising by his manner that he had something to tell.

"I HAVE been an archeologist for nearly forty years, and I have had some exciting times digging up the remains of once flourishing kingdoms, but the climax of my whole life happened to me a few weeks ago in connection with these selfsame mummies," he began.

"I was excavating in the ruins of ancient Babylon with a boon companion. He and I were in the same quad at Oxford. We have globe-trotted together since our college days.

"Upon my word, sir, I had the most remarkable adventure, the most thrilling I have ever heard of. It is past belief, and had I not been present at the time, and known that it was all absolutely true, and not a dream, I should certainly brand it as a fabulous lie."

He looked around cautiously, and then settled himself for the story.

"From last December until June of the present year, my companion and I, together with the other archeologists, excavated in the ruins of ancient Babylon.

"We two occupied a small three-room hut, built of ancient sun-dried bricks, inscribed with hieroglyphics, showing that they had once been used in a temple of the Sun God. Our hut stood apart from the others, overshadowed by a grove of waving, shady palms.

"We dug deeper and deeper into the ruins of that one-time Mecca of wealth, vice and art. The small fragments of marble statuary, bronze coins, occasional shreds of papyrus, broken vases, carved gems and crumbled walls contributed to my excitement and frenzy. But frenzy is a weak word, sir. I slept anywhere from twenty-five minutes to two hours a day for weeks previous to June 19th. That day of days! I gulped my meals on the way to the diggings. I considered eating and sleeping impediments.

"I had been working a lifetime just for that moment, or one like it. But I little expected what it would be like —the thrill of it. That is the charm of an archeologist's life. It did come at last!

"Early that afternoon we struck the cornice of a drab-looking tomb. A wild cry of joy escaped me. We had unearthed just as promising specimens on previous days, it seemed to my partner, but with a madman's fury and strength I tore a shovel from the hands of a coolie and burrowed into the sand. It seemed an eternity before I had uncovered the slab that marked the entrance to the tomb. The weight of the drifting sand had borne heavily against this door and cracked it. With chisels we drove the portions apart sufficiently to allow a man to pass inside.

"The tomb had been sealed for more than 2500 years from light and air. It was like going into a black, lifeless vacuum.

"In I pushed. Inflamed with curiosity, my companion crawled in after me. I rushed to one side of the vault and pried open a sarcophagus—a highly ornamental, stone coffin. Picking up the mummy that lay in it, I gently unwrapped the face and covered it with passionate kisses. For long I knelt, embracing it tenderly."

I stared at the old man, fancying a thousand causes, each a tale in itself, to account for his apparent lunacy, but none even approached the real truth.

"When I was satisfied," he continued, "I replaced that mummy slowly and tenderly. Going to the other side of the stately tomb, I pried up the lid of a similar mummy-case and disclosed the face of its occupant. I knelt and gazed steadfastly at it.

"SOMETIME afterward my companion dismissed the coolies for the day and we sat down on the marble floor. I told him the story as we sat there on the floor of the tomb, as I am telling you now.

"From my arrival there I felt that the surroundings were unaccountably familiar and that I had been there before. Each bit of broken pottery reassured me, until about a month previous, when I became almost positive of it. But how? I had never been within five hundred miles of the place in all my travels, until I arrived there last December.

"All day as we dug and dug, I had strange recollections of Egypt, where I have never been; princesses that I have never seen; the magic of medicines no longer known to man; rich jewels; huge masses of gold; and marvelous courts with troops of slaves. Nothing we unearthed was strange to me. But how?

"The morning on which we struck the cornice of the tomb, which looked so plain from the exterior, the same feeling welled up in me more intensified. After I saw the kingly interior, I seemed to recognize it as if I had seen it before. I seemed to know that tomb as thoroughly as if I had fashioned it myself. But now it is perfectly clear to me.

"Sir, one of those mummies was once a poor, wandering practitioner in herbs, but he knew all of Egypt's secrets. He could kill or cure at will the giant or the leper. He journeyed from his native land, Egypt, to Babylon—the city of fabulous wealth and dazzling courts. He was one of the first to bring these secrets to this Babylon; hence the sensation that he made.

"All of his cures seemed miracles. People flocked by the thousands around the great young physician. His fame spread to the upper classes. After several seemingly impossible healings, he became the intimate friend of a rich trader, who was so wealthy, sir, that it was a burden for him to build storehouses for his wealth. The trader was an old man, but the two became inseparable companions. All of the old man's gold was at the disposal of the young physician. You may be sure that he used it."

The narrator smiled and bobbed his head up and down many times.

"The other mummy was bedecked with jewels and gems of the rarest luster. She was a Babylonian princess, the dearly beloved one of the young doctor. After he became associated with the wealthy Phenician, he met her almost daily, for he attended the royal family as their physician.

"She was a breath from heaven, my dear sir. A breath from heaven, I say. Even now the profile of her mummy is perfect. Her beauty was Oriental and enchanting. Her slightest wish it was his greatest joy to satisfy. Like many others, he fell madly in love with her. He sought her company as often as he dared. He had an added excuse for being near her, for he pretended to be attending her ills. She fostered his attentions and fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, for his lot, she soon returned his love.

"He converted her to his belief, the religion of a gloomy hereafter, which required the preservation of the body. The Babylonians were carnal, and heedless of death and life after death—quite different from his fellow countrymen, the Egyptians. That is the reason why these were the only two mummies in all of rich Babylon. He told her of the next life, and they worshiped together in secret. She doubly respected him as a savior and as a healer.

"So far, the king had allowed their friendship to go on unrestrained, but he soon noticed the intimacy with his daughter, for the young physician had overstepped the bounds of mere heal-

ing. This was dangerous for the young doctor, as the king had promised her as wife to a wealthy satrap of one of his provinces. The bargain was bound by the king's signet and a cash consideration. A row of gold coins one parasang long (about three miles), placed side by side, was to be given to the king upon delivery of his daughter. The day was drawing near when she was to be handed over, and everlasting separation appeared to be at hand.

"A father's rule over his child was iron-clad; as a divine-right king, he had absolute rule over her as his subject. She was both child and subject. The inevitable was approaching. Obedience to her father had been taught her from the very cradle, so she could not force herself to disobey him.

"But, on the other hand, the natural instinct had been so aroused in her warm, affectionate self that she would not forsake the young doctor for her father's choice. They faced a dilemma. They wouldn't leave each other, but it seemed that they must.

"THE eve of her wedding day arrived. The king's palace was aglow with excitement, in preparation for the great event. She had a female servant who came to a certain gate of the palace every evening at sundown to receive the daily love missive for her mistress. On this particular trip, the young doctor sent word by this servant for his loved one to elope with him, and for her to come to the gate sometime during the midnight watch, where he would be waiting with horses.

"Their escape was unmolested until they reached the outer guards of the city. They galloped past at a rapid rate without offering the password. The guards mistook them for spies or thieves, and galloped after them.

"They rode steadily southward into the Arabian desert. The guards followed in pursuit, but after a while abandoned the chase, when they found they could not overtake the two without extreme effort, which was too much to expect of any guard during a festival at the capital.

"They came to an oasis near the north rim of the desert, where dwelt a cloistered prophet, who taught the young doctor much of his magic and healing. The holy man gave them refuge and wedded them. His oasis was considered very sacred. Even the nomadic outlaws of the desert never molested him. Thus they were sheltered so long as they stayed under his protection.

"They rested several days and then decided to start on. But they continually saw across the wastes of sand bands of horsemen passing by. Then one band halted at the hermitage for water. The two remained hidden during the travelers' stay, and learned upon departure that the band was one of the many parties that were combing every bit of the king's domain to find the king's daughter.

"They sent out slaves of the holy man on different nights to ascertain if they could run the gantlet, but all were evidently captured by searching caravans, for none was ever allowed to return to them. That proved the futility of attempting to escape.

"If they should try to flee from their prison, they would be certainly separated. He would be killed if they were discovered together, and she compelled to marry the foreign ruler.

"Life on that oasis would become irksome before long. She was accustomed to luxury, and the entertainment of a king's court. He was a confirmed wanderer, and permanency was distasteful. They faced the truth squarely. They could attempt flight and be separated; or else they must remain and watch their love

slowly wane in the close confinement, and so grow to hate each other as they then loved.

"They decided to solve the problem by committing dual suicide. They promised on their souls that they would unite in the next life, to dwell together in happiness eternal.

"But the grave difficulty was to obtain an appropriate burial place. They wished to rest side by side, that their souls might travel on together. She desired to be buried in the burial ground of her native Babylon. This necessitated a trip to the city to prepare their tomb. But he was well known at the capital and would be suspected instantly if he appeared again shortly after the king's daughter had vanished.

"So he bleached the hair on his head and face. You cannot imagine the change that it made in his appearance. Then he donned the holy garb of the old prophet.

"Thus masquerading, he journeyed to Babylon, and obtained the gold from his benefactor, the wealthy Phenician, to build the tomb. The construction was well begun and all arrangements made for its completion before he returned to the hermitage. The old prophet was well practised in the art of embalming, and agreed to embalm him and see that the two bodies were placed in the tomb, and have the tomb sealed without anyone's knowing the identity of its occupants.

"The funeral procession from the hermitage into Babylon would be an unhindered one. The Babylonians very much disliked the thought of death or the remains of death and would avoid a funeral caravan whenever possible.

"Then all was in readiness. They set a date when all was to end, and then spent one last sweet fortnight together. During that time they never halted their love-making. Such caressing! Such tenderness! And such strong love! Never since the creation of man have two tarried in more divine love. All because it was definitely limited.

"As the end drew near it grew stronger and stronger. Their souls seemed to mold into one. There were no longer two of them. They thought, breathed and lived as one, and died as one.

"When the young doctor administered the potion of hemlock and the pain-soothing myrrh to her, and watched life ebb from her sweet body, he felt a deadening sensation come over him. In the sixteen days that he took in which to embalm her body, he never spoke, he never ate, he never slept. He was but a living corpse.

"When his task was complete, he needed no potion to summon death. He merely lay down and life left him.

"All that he left to be done was done according to his requests."

I HAD listened intently to every word and sat in silence a few minutes after the old man had ended his tale.

Then I asked, "How is it that you know the story so fully concerning these two mummies? And why did you feel as if you had been in the tomb before?"

"One of those mummies was I as much as this," he pointed to himself, "is I. Reincarnation, you see. I, me, myself, whatever you call it, was in one of those bodies at one time. That body felt as I feel, saw as I see, heard as I hear. You have felt sometimes that you know that you know. Well, I know that I know, and I also know that I knew. That is as near as I can explain it."

He paused a minute before he continued.

"I recall all of this, it seems, out of my memory, as if I went through it no more than five years ago, when in reality it must have been 2500 years at least. I did fashion that tomb.

That is why I knew it so well," he said.

"I wonder if she, too, will go back to that spot," the old man murmured softly, looking straight ahead without seeing.

Then something shocked him back to where he was physically.

"I'll have to be going now," he said, hurriedly rising. "But before I leave I want to tell you that I have my own mummy and the princess' mummy in my possession now. I'll show them to you if I get the opportunity before I leave."

He disappeared around some small indoor palms that stood at the backs of our chairs.

He had scarcely gone from sight, when two uniformed police came up the aisle toward me.

"Has a small old man in some dirty, linen clothes passed by since you have been sitting here?" one asked me in Italian.

"Several have passed here," I answered, to parry his question. "Is such a man wanted?"

He grasped my coat collar in his impatience, swore to his full satisfaction in far-from-endearing terms, known only in a language that has developed in a warm, leisurely climate, and then repeated, "Has such a man passed here?"

I wagged my head slowly in the opposite direction from the one taken by the old man. They followed my directions, and started off in search of him.

"What's the charge?" I shouted after them.

"Stealing a pair of mummies from the British Museum," one of them flung over his shoulder as they darted around the corner out of sight.

COMING SOON!

Two Smashing Novelettes

UNDER THE N-RAY

A Thrilling Tale of Reincarnation

By WILL SMITH *and* R. J. ROBBINS

BLACK MEDICINE

A Novelette of Haitian Voodoo

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

WATCH FOR THESE STORIES IN WEIRD TALES

THE FLAMING EYES

A Complete Novelette

by Fletcher R. Milton

THE night was black and stormy. The sharp wind which had been blowing all day had freshened toward evening, so that now at about 8 o'clock, as I returned to town after a protracted day at the neighboring cliffs, it was a terrific gale.

An archeologist by profession, I had spent the past week searching the cliffs for hidden openings, crude steps, or ancient ladderways, which should support my documentary evidence of the existence of an ancient cliff city in great caverns in the solid rock. The chief result of my investigations in Arizona had been the discovery of a number of carvings on stone, which when deciphered made reference to a magnificent city once existing in the cliffs near the present city of X——. Accordingly I had come with the ardent hope of making discoveries which should compare with those recently made by myself and others in the valley of the Euphrates.

X—— is a small city of about five thousand souls situated in the central part of New Mexico. On account of its hot and cold springs it has earned for itself a considerable reputation as a health resort. Though it is in nowise a beautiful town, the climate is dry, the air is pure and clean and the temperature is warm, often indeed very hot. Accordingly many people have flocked into it to receive the cure promised by the magical waters of its springs and its health-giving air.

The city itself spreads all the way across a sloping ridge, which gradually rises upward until it terminates in an abrupt precipice, along whose steep sides I had been making my search. Although there is only one main business street, there are shops scattered about in various parts of the town.

On this late evening I was passing a small curio shop, in the window of which were displayed curiously carven oriental images, incense burners and so on, and as I looked into it I remembered a purchase I had so far neglected to make.

About a year before I had received by mail a fantastic oriental devil in bronze, along with a rather odd letter. The letter was from an older acquaintance of mine, then living in X——, but of whom I had received no word since that time. It stated that this quite innocent-looking image was casting a curse over my friend's life, that it had a strange history which he would refrain from telling, and suggested that I use my own judgment about keeping the gift or giving it away. I did use my judgment and.

as the cast figure was of hollow bronze, I conceived the idea of having it converted into an incense burner, which I did accordingly. But so far I had never thought of getting the incense, and the bronze devil stood unused on a shelf at home.

Now, quite willing to get out of the wind for a moment, I entered the shop.

As the door opened, the wind of itself almost blew me inside, and before I could close the door again behind me there had been havoc done in the shop. I saw packages, cards and papers flying from the counter, and just as I managed to get the door closed I heard a crash of a falling object.

I stepped forward with an apology on my lips.

As I did so I saw the proprietor, a tall, dark-skinned East Indian in flowing Hindoo garb, facing me with his teeth showing in an evil snarl. His teeth were yellow and long, and as he stood with his mouth half open I had a feeling that I was facing a wolf rather than a human being.

But it was his eyes which stilled my tongue and sent wild chills down my back. They were red, flaming red, and just now they were two seething pits of fire which seemed to sear my very soul. I had a moment of terrible fear. I felt the hair starting to stand straight up on my head.

Then the East Indian let his eyes fall from mine to the floor. He stooped, and as I stepped forward I saw him holding broken fragments of some object in his hand. I saw behind the counter other fragments, evidently the pieces of the article which had fallen as I entered.

While he stood contemplating a grotesquely-shaped arm and the squat body of some oriental figure, I put my hand into my pocket.

"I am sorry," I said, drawing out my purse. "I will pay for it."

"You pay?" Again his eyes blazed into my own. "You pay for this?"

"Yes," I said, taking a banknote from my purse. "The wind. My fault."

"No." His mouth closed into a grim line and the flame in his eyes seethed. "You cannot pay for this with gold! You pay for it only with —your soul!"

"My soul!" I repeated, feeling my senses numb as my eyes looked into his.

As his eyes flamed into mine I felt as if I were near an immense blazing furnace. I felt the heat on my face, felt it searing my body, felt my throat parch.

Then he was speaking again and his eyes were turned to the floor.

"It is nothing. See? I will break it again."

He raised his arm and threw the pieces of the broken figure on the floor so that they were shattered again into dozens of smaller particles. I experienced a distinct shock as the fragments struck the floor and immediately I felt the sweat breaking out on my face.

Then he was speaking in a soft, friendly voice.

"You wished something, sahib?"

"Some incense—sandalwood," I muttered, taking my handkerchief from my pocket and wiping my forehead, which was beaded with sweat.

He turned away, and when he faced me again I surveyed the man and was surprized to think that I had imagined anything unusual or uncanny about him. His eyes were brown, though with a lurking reddish tinge in their depths. He was smiling pleasantly enough and I noted that his swarthy face was almost handsome. His age was hard to determine, anywhere from thirty-five to fifty years.

"Sorry, sahib," he apologized. "No sandalwood. But I have something

better. Rare incense. Would you like it?"

"Yes. Anything will be all right," I replied, anxious to be gone.

He took a small oblong package from beneath the counter, wrapped it and handed it to me. I held the banknote out to him.

"Take out for the broken article," I said.

"No," he replied. "It was nothing, sahib. A trifle. Almost worthless. Forget it."

He handed me my change and I turned and started for the door.

"The incense!" he called after me. "It is rare. Wonderful. You must try it—soon!"

Something in his voice made me turn, and for an instant I felt his eyes blazing into my own. Then the flame died and he smiled at me a pleasant smile.

Without a word I stumbled from the shop, pulled the door shut after me and fought my way onward through the storm.

2

UPON my arrival in the town I had rented a small house, vacant for some time previous to my occupancy and distant from the curio shop about three blocks. I had three rooms and a bath, one room as a living room, one as a bedroom, and one as a study. It was in this latter room that I kept my documents and studied over them, and in fact it was here that I spent the most of my time when indoors. My meals I took out at a restaurant about a block distant. The house was equipped with an electric water-heater for my bath, and I had a woman come in and tidy up each day. All in all I was fixed very comfortably indeed.

After a late dinner at the restaurant I arrived at my house, and went immediately to my study. I drew books and papers before me and tried to interest myself in my work. But I was curiously disturbed. I was unable to shake off a feeling of restlessness. I could not fix my mind upon the matters in hand, and finally I pushed books and papers aside. For a while I sat nervously clasping and unclasping my hands, and finally I got to my feet and began to pace back and forth across the floor.

There was nothing that should have worried me. Naturally I was somewhat discouraged by my failure so far to find a hint of the cliff city, but that alone should not have depressed me, as I knew that I had not yet made more than a superficial examination of the region. Otherwise I had a good, comfortable private income and a host of friends scattered in all parts of the world. In addition I had won honors in archeology, of which I could be justly proud.

In my pacing between the study table and the door I chanced to raise my eyes and I saw the grotesque, grinning devil-incense burner on a shelf on the far wall, beyond the table and directly opposite the door leading into my living room. Immediately my heart gave a throb and I felt a thrill through my whole body.

Rare incense! The East Indian had urged me to try it soon! I would try it now!

I hurried across the room, took down the grinning devil and set it on the study table. Then I took the small oblong package from my overcoat pocket and opened it. I found it to contain six slim cigarettelike cubes of reddish-brown incense. The color was peculiar, and I felt myself wondering where I had seen it before. Then I remembered the Hindoo's eyes. The cubes of incense were exactly the color of the oriental's eyes after the flame had died in them.

I lifted the head off the devil-incense burner, thrust one of the cubes down into the hollow cavity of the bronze body and, procuring a match

from a box on the table, lighted the upper end of the cube.

When the match died I found myself gazing at a red, flaming eye on the end of the cube of incense! One eye! The Hindoo had had two eyes that glowed just like that! I took another cube from the box, lighted it and thrust it into the cavity beside the other, where it glowed and seethed with a red flame.

Two eyes! Two flaming red eyes! If only there were the long yellow teeth!

I became conscious of a pungent perfume. The odor was peculiar, intoxicating. I felt myself suddenly filled with a great elation, a sense of power.

The aromatic smoke floated upward to the ceiling. The two eyes glowed. I felt them searing deep into my own.

With an effort I lifted the grinning head and set it back on the slender shoulders. But I could still see the glow through the hollow devil-eyes, pinpoints of flaming red.

The grayish-white smoke of the burning incense poured from the mouth of the devil and trailed upward to the ceiling. It filled the whole room. My sense of power increased. I was conscious of a feeling of lightness.

The smoke grew dense. The table gradually became obliterated before my eyes. Only the grinning devil with its two glowing eyes was visible. Finally even it was obliterated.

I was light, light like air. I was floating. I had a sense of motion as of running, or of flying.

Through an immense wind-swept region, past leering gods and grinning devils, past a great belching flame that seared my body and parched my throat. Then into an intensely cold place, damp, soggy, freezing cold, so that the perspiration froze on my body. Then into pleasant warmth where was a great quiet and peace.

B

The room was luxuriously furnished, thick carpets on the floor, two or three upholstered chairs near the door, and a small mahogany stand in the center. Glowing electric chandeliers filled the room with bright light.

The room was small, perhaps an anteroom. I stood in the middle of the room. Before me was a curtained doorway. I was fully self-possessed, sure.

I tiptoed to the doorway, peered through it. There was intense blackness in the room beyond. I felt a flashlight in my hand and snapped it on so that a fanlike arm of light swept across the dark room.

Then I started across it, past chairs and tables to a door at the far side.

I stopped by the door, which was partly ajar. A soft, mellow light shone through the opening into the room.

I became conscious of a faint hissing noise, which seemed to rise and fall as by regular rhythm. After a prolonged hiss there would be a choking cough, then another hiss, followed by silence broken almost instantly by a hiss, and so on.

Listening, I had a sudden feeling of fear, of panic. I snapped off my flashlight and stood quavering in the darkness.

The sound was in front of me, inside of the room from which the light streamed. Something impelled me forward. I felt myself moving toward the door.

Then I stopped, while my blood froze. There was someone behind me! I heard light footfalls on the carpet! I heard quick breathing! Someone was approaching!

I crept silently away from the doorway into the darkness. In my left hand was the flashlight, while in my right I gripped the handle of a short automatic.

The intruder approached the door. I saw the opening widening. Slowly, cautiously, the door swung wide. I crouched behind a table (a billiard table it seemed to be) to hide myself from the light that spread out toward me from the open door.

From my position I could see quite clearly into the room beyond. The room was lighted by four glaring eyes of light, which glowed brilliantly from the sockets of two great bronze images, which stood with outspread arms on a raised platform opposite the doorway. The figures were stolid, but the features were commanding and with the glaring eyes made a startling picture. In front of the platform was a low altar railing, and between this and the door I could see low benches, apparently of stone. The floor was uncarpeted and of stone or concrete.

The hissing seemed to come from behind the images, and I could detect a trace of white smoke or steam rising upward over the heads of the bronze figures.

An arm appeared across the lighted doorway, a shoulder. Then a slim figure framed itself there, a form straight, graceful. Slender legs cased in white riding breeches, slender arms in well-cut riding jacket. A gray cap was pulled low over the forehead.

Cautiously the slender figure crept through the doorway into the room, toward the raised platform. I caught the gleam of a knife in the right hand of the grim stalker, and I felt that certainly there must be something living in that room as an objective.

I found myself in the midst of a terrible mental struggle. I had an overpowering impulse to run forward, to interfere in what would evidently be cold-blooded murder enacted in that hissing room. Against this impulse I felt an impelling force holding me to silence, to inaction. It seemed as if a voice were speaking in command:

"Wait until the knife strikes, till death-screams rend the air, then take aim, shoot the murderer!"

At one time I felt my arm rising, my eyes taking bead on the slender moving figure, waiting for the arm with the gleaming knife to upraise, to strike once, perhaps twice, at some unseen animated form, then to shoot.

But my brain cleared. My impulse to interfere was mastered. I thrust my automatic into my belt, my flashlight into my pocket, and got to my feet. I ran forward, swiftly, silently, through the door and upon the death-stalker.

My adversary was taken by surprize: he had not heard my approach. But he was agile and quick to struggle, though I found him no match for me in strength.

For a moment we struggled silently, without sound. Then the struggle ended as abruptly as it had started. My adversary went limp in my arms, so that I had to hold him to keep him from falling.

The instinct to flee was strong upon me. I picked up my unconscious antagonist and ran with his body in my arms, out of the lighted room into the blackness of the room beyond. There I stopped and listened. Still the regular choked hissing, and no sight or other sound of anything living in the room.

Hesitating barely an instant, I ran out of the darkness into the lighted anteroom, which I had left just a few minutes before.

Reaching the lighted room, my captive began to struggle again in my arms and squirmed free, the cap falling from his head as he did so.

Then I was amazed to see that the would-be murderer was a woman, young, beautiful, in trim, dainty riding costume. Light golden hair crowned a clear white forehead. Her blue eyes were wide as she looked into mine, her red-lipped mouth was parted in surprize, in fright.

4

"Who—who are you?" she gasped, drawing away from me and preparing herself for flight.

I stepped close to her and suddenly clasped my arms on her shoulders, and held her so. She made a movement as if to raise the knife which she still held in her hand, but I held her so tightly she could not. After a moment she ceased to struggle and stood before me listless.

"Who are you?" she repeated insistently.

"I might better ask that than you," I said, shaking her roughly. "How come I to find you with a knife in your hand, creeping into that room, intent evidently upon stabbing someone whom I could not see?"

"I—I do not know. I am—afraid."

She looked at me with a great fear in her eyes.

"Who is in that room? Whom were you going to kill?" I insisted.

"I do not know," she repeated. Then, as she saw the pistol in my belt, she asked, "Why are you here, with a pistol strapped to your belt?"

I suddenly felt at a loss. My mind groped for the answer to her question. There was, there must be a good logical reason why I should be there. I looked at the pistol, which I remembered thrusting into my belt as I ran forward upon the form with the upraised knife. It was my own. It was the automatic which I always carried with me into dangerous places. I had carried it along with me today to the cliffs. And it had been gripped in my hands but a moment ago.

"Why?" she insisted, with a note of sharpness in her voice.

"Why—I—I don't know," I stammered uncertainly. "I seem to have forgotten something."

"You were going to shoot—me," she guessed.

I remembered my impulse when she was creeping into the lighted room and I knew that she was right, partly at least. And she . . .

"Were you not stalking me to stab me to death?" I asked, looking her squarely in the eyes. She had very beautiful eyes, deep, alluring, mysterious.

She made no reply for a moment, and I sensed that she was undergoing a mental struggle. In a moment she spoke in a voice low and musical.

"I must not, dare not tell you, anything. I am afraid to tell you. You might be . . . Tell me, who are you? Tell me!"

I felt an urge to hold my tongue, but I disregarded it.

"I am Andrew Bishop, archeologist, carrying on investigations which I hope will result in the discovery of an ancient cliff city. I am a man of reputation and honor, and worthy of your trust and confidence. Now, pray tell me who you are. What are you doing here? Why are you afraid?"

"I cannot tell you who I am or why I have the knife in my hand, though if I told you you would know that I have a better right to be here than you. I do not know what I am afraid of, exactly, something terrible, which is always present and hears everything, sees everything. Strange things have happened and I would not even dare to ask you for help. I have heard of you, but after all I do not know—I fear you may belong to it—the thing!"

"The thing!" I echoed.

"Yes," she whispered. "Don't you feel, almost see, near you, eyes watching, terrible eyes?"

I looked about me apprehensively. I could make out nothing tangible, but I could sense something. Certainly I was afraid.

"Yes," I whispered in reply. "I feel something. Please trust me. I

will help you if I can. What can I do?"

"Nothing," she said despairingly. "I cannot escape."

"Escape?"

"No. It is impossible."

"But you can escape. I will help you."

I released her shoulders and took both of her hands in mine, feeling the knife gripped tightly in one of them. I looked into her eyes and I saw confidence and hope growing in them.

Then we heard a sound behind us, in the dark room we had just left. We stood a moment clasping each other's hands, looking at each other with a nameless fear in our eyes.

"Quick!" she whispered, breaking the spell that held us fast. "We must run quickly! Come!"

She grasped my arm and we ran through the door ahead of us, which she pulled open, and out into an intense blackness. We ran and ran, and we heard sounds of pursuit behind us. Once I looked back to see two red eyes flaming behind us out of the darkness. I felt my senses numb.

We stopped suddenly. I knew that she had stopped me.

"It is coming! It will catch us!" she whispered, clutching my arm with one hand and pointing with the long-bladed knife in the other. "Run straight on, there. If we separate we may both escape."

"No!"

I felt my senses clearing a little.

"I will stay and fight while you escape."

"No! You must not!" she insisted, her breath warm on my cheek. "It would kill you. Go now. Escape. I will be all right. But if you can, come tomorrow night. You have offered to help me and I must have help. I beg you to come!"

"Come? But where?" I asked breathlessly.

"Here. The way you came. Good-bye."

She pressed my hand, released it, and I heard her running.

A moment I stood while my heart pounded. Then I ran on as she had pointed, swiftly. I had a sensation of numbing senses, of bodily elation, of lightness. I was flying, floating.

A terrible cold chilled my limbs, made my lungs ache. Then I was suddenly in fire, in terrific heat which scorched me.

Still I ran, or flew, while angry, grotesque gods and devils struck at me and opened wolflike jaws to sink yellow fangs into my flesh.

But I evaded all, felt myself being tossed, thrown, blown about like a feather. Then I felt quiet and rest.

5.

The grotesque oriental devil stood before me on the table. No longer did smoke belch from the half-open, grinning mouth; no longer did two pinpoints of flame glow from the eyes. I lifted the head from the shoulders and saw that the incense had burned completely out. Only a faint trace of the peculiar perfume was noticeable in the room.

The lights blazed from the chandeliers. I looked about me. I stood up, tried my limbs.

I was here alive, and from the look of things I had never been out of this room!

But the vision of those other scenes was vivid in my mind. It was real. It must be real. The bright anteroom, the dark room adjoining, the choked hissing noise, the lighted room and its two images with the brilliantly glaring eyes, the silent form creeping through the lighted doorway, my own pistol upraised. Then my interference, the short struggle, my flight with a light form in my arms, the beautiful girl with her fear-stricken blue eyes, the interruption and our flight, those flaming red eyes

pursuing . . . It was all real enough to make me catch my breath, look about me.

I thought of my pistol. I thrust my hand to my belt and found it there, but that proved nothing, as I had carried my automatic with me to the cliffs. My flashlight also was in my pocket, but I always carried that with me so that I might investigate any openings I should find. Neither pistol nor flashlight proved anything.

Could it have been a dream? It must have been.

I thought of the girl. She had been so beautiful. She was just the type of girl that I could love. Her alluring blue eyes, her lovely red lips, her beautiful golden hair! I loved her now.

She had told me to come again, that she must have help. Must!

Oh, well. What of it? I should have to dismiss it all as a dream.

I tried to dismiss it and retired to bed. But I could not sleep well that night. I tumbled and tossed and felt myself tormented by a pair of flaming red eyes; haunted by a beautiful girl in white riding breeches and jacket, whose eyes pleaded for help; startled by choked hissing noises coming to me in a vast endless darkness.

The morning dawned and I started about my usual schedule. After breakfasting at the restaurant I started off to the cliffs with a short pick over my shoulder for exploring into the crevices of the rocks. I spent the whole forenoon searching about and digging in the crannies of the cliff wall. I found nothing to encourage me.

I returned to town at noon and I decided not to go out that afternoon. I was restless, perturbed. I had a sense of impending danger which I tried vainly to shake off. I spent the rest of the day taking in the sights of the little city.

I had always been very much interested in the famous springs which were the chief attraction of the town. There were five springs altogether. Three of these were hot, all close together and enclosed by a high steel wire fence to guard against small children falling into the scalding water which filled the concrete basin about them. The water did not come up as a geyser, but only bubbled a steady flow of steaming white water.

Watching the white liquid flowing out of the wide lime-encrusted mouths I reflected that somewhere beneath, and not so very far beneath, there must be hot volcanic rocks and molten beds of lava.

Though these hot springs were unusual in themselves, contrast with the other two springs made an unusual phenomenon. These two springs were distant about a block from the three first mentioned, and were also enclosed, with a separate pool of their own. But instead of being boiling hot they were as cold as if they flowed from a frozen glacier. The temperature of the water was only slightly above freezing. This phenomenon was the more unusual on account of the warm dry region. Undoubtedly the springs were fed from some reservoir deep in the earth, kept cold by geologic forces. Certainly no one would believe that there was a glacier underneath. However, there could be no doubt about there being a wide divergence in the sources of the hot and cold springs whose mouths were so close together.

In the late afternoon I passed the curio shop. Something impelled me to step in, to see if my sensations of the previous evening would be repeated.

There was no wind this evening and I entered without mishap. There was no one visible behind the counter, or in sight anywhere. Nevertheless I was conscious of someone watching me closely. As I looked back toward the rear of the shop I saw facing me a

large bronze figure, a huge idol with evil, malevolent grin. I could imagine its great eyes bent on me balefully.

The huge fists of the figure were clasped together and upraised as if to strike or to hurl anything which might be clasped between the great fingers. One leg was thrust forward, and I could imagine a gleam in the wicked black eyes—could imagine that the figure was preparing to run forward upon me.

A moment I stood facing the menacing figure, then, conquered by a nameless fear, I turned and hastily left the shop. Outside I reflected that I had been a fool to allow such uncanny thoughts to master even for a moment my usual courage. Nevertheless I was certain that the figure had not been standing in the rear of the shop on my first visit, at least not in its present striking attitude. I would certainly in that case have noticed it, as would anyone ordinarily observant.

I walked about, trying to shake off a feeling of uneasiness. I dined, and when darkness came on, which it did at that season about 7 o'clock, I returned to my house and went to my study.

The grinning bronze devil still sat on the table as I had left it the night before. My housekeeper had strict orders to disturb nothing in my study, and the orders were carefully observed. I sniffed the air for a trace of the peculiar perfume, but I could smell nothing out of the ordinary.

I sat down before the table and dropped my head in my hands. Against my will my thoughts turned to the strange phenomenon of last night, whether dream or reality I could not decide.

The girl had said she must see me "tomorrow night." That was tonight. But where should I see her? How?

She was in danger. She had asked me to help her. How?

Where was she?

I raised my head and considered the bronze devil. After a moment I lifted off the grinning head. I took out two cubes of incense from the oblong box at my right hand. I thrust them into the hollow bronze body, found a match and lighted them.

The two flaming eyes glowed and seethed. A peculiar aromatic perfume smote my nostrils.

I put the grinning head back on the shoulders. The eyes glowed with pinpoints of red. Grayish-white smoke belched from between the black evil teeth, trailed upward to the ceiling, and filled the whole room.

The smoke became dense, obscured all else. I felt myself flying through a great stillness, past jeering grotesque devils who laughed at me, into white-hot flame, through frozen space, then into comfortable warmth and quiet.

6

I WAS in absolute darkness. I could see nothing. It was as if I were blind.

Intense stillness reigned. Only the faint beating of my own heart, the quick terrified gasping of my own breath, were audible.

I was on all fours, hands and knees resting on thick carpet. I was listening for something, some sound, some signal.

Finally I heard it: soft footfalls, a door opening behind me. I crouched in the darkness, poised to leap like a beast of prey. I waited until the footfalls sounded opposite, holding my breath, my breast pressed to the thick soft carpet to smother the beating of my own heart.

I allowed the footfalls to pass by, to go on and on, away from me into the distance. After an interval I heard the opening of a door, and in a moment I heard it close again.

Then I got to my feet cautiously, silently. As if guided by a sixth sense I moved across the room to a door. I

opened the door, stepped through it, and closed it behind me.

A pale subdued light filled the room I was now in, which was bare, unfurnished, uncarpeted. The same deathly silence prevailed. There was no sign of life, of motion.

Cautiously I walked across the room, exploring it. I looked upward. The light entered from overhead, through small round openings. It streamed in faintly as the light might shine into a deep well at night when there was no moon. I could make out nothing clearly, just the bare outlines of a room whose dimensions I was unable to determine.

I waited expectant.

Suddenly a door opened before me. I knew it was not the one through which I had entered. A pale white figure hesitated in the doorway. The door closed and the figure approached. It came near.

"You came!"

In the silence of the room the whisper was loud in my ears. I felt my blood stir.

"Yes," I answered, as I stepped across the room to meet the one who had just entered.

I came close. I saw it was the girl. I had known it would be. She was very beautiful in the pale light. She was not now dressed in riding costume but in a long filmy white gown, which showed her arms bare and beautiful, her shoulders white and lovely. I was conscious of the deep blue of her eyes even in the subdued light, while her red-lipped mouth seemed like a pale delicate rosebud just opening to unfold its pinkish glow. She was small, slender, beautiful.

She came to me and gripped my arm; she pulled me away, led me to the door through which she had entered. We went through it together, into a room lighted by chandeliers.

This room was small but brightly furnished, gay pictures on the walls, velvet-covered chairs, a table with a few books neatly arranged upon it. One thing that I noted was the absence of windows, and as I thought of it I knew that this feature was in common with the other rooms I had seen.

Inside the room with the door closed the girl let go of my arm and stood away from me a little. She was breathing quickly as with excitement, her lips slightly parted. I found myself looking into her eyes, drinking in the blue of them, feeling refreshed, exhilarated.

7

"I AM so glad you came," she whispered after a moment.

"I also am glad," I replied. "Now, please tell me who you are, what you fear, everything."

"I should not do that, but I must," she said. "Will you promise to do as I say after I tell you, to make no move without my permission?"

"I promise," I replied eagerly.

"Then listen carefully. My father in his youth was an explorer, traveler, adventurer. He wandered many times over the face of the globe, visited innumerable out-of-the-way places in many countries. He had many adventures, had many hair-breadth escapes. He was shot at by bandits in Spain, menaced by native spearmen in Africa, but he always escaped with his life, laughing, smiling, debonair.

"This was all before he met my mother. After he met her and married her he settled down and traveled no more, contenting himself with telling to those who would listen, the strange and thrilling adventures through which he had passed.

"But when my mother died a few years ago he became restless. There came on him a longing to have just one more round of adventures before he died. I loved him and did not like to see him go, but I could not ask him to stay and be unhappy.

"He was gone two years. When he came back he was different. He was strange. He seemed to dislike to have other people about. We left our friends and came here, a place much more barren then than it is now.

"I knew that something was preying on his mind. I begged him to tell me what was bothering him. Finally he told me a story.

"He was traveling through an unsettled region in upper India. He was alone, having left his party at a village six or seven miles back and ridden on ahead by himself. He came upon an old ruined temple.

"The temple was apparently deserted, and it awoke his curiosity. He dismounted, tied his horse, and entered. There were rough benches of stone, and at the far end a low platform and an altar railing.

"He walked down the empty aisle, in his mind a picture of those benches once filled with worshiping natives with a native priest presiding.

"As he stood at the altar railing looking upward he saw raised above the platform a huge, malevolently grinning god. One of its great legs was thrust forward, its arms were upraised and in the great fists was clasped a small grotesque devil, which he was in the act of dashing down to destruction.

"The whole thing was of bronze, and was symbolic probably of the destruction of forces of evil by a benevolent god. My father went up on the platform to examine the figures.

"He was particularly impressed with the grinning devil in the huge fists of the god. Upon touching this with his fingers he found that dampness and rain had loosened the cement which held it in place. Pulling a little he was able to free it entirely from the great fists.

"My father was daring and, without a thought of any possible consequences, he thrust the small image into his coat pocket. Looking about to see that he had not been observed, he hurried down from the platform and out of the temple. At the entrance he looked back, and he imagined that the face of the god had screwed itself into a look of anger, that the eyes gleamed.

"Shaken a little, and knowing how the superstitious people of the region might act toward a robber of their shrine, he lost no time in getting to his horse. Just as he was ready to mount he heard an angry shouting from the temple, and a large Hindoo in flowing priestly garb came running from the ruined doorway toward him. He was gesticulating and uttering curses in his native tongue.

"My father sprang upon his horse, and as he did so a half dozen dark-skinned natives appeared along the path by which he had come and menaced him with long glittering knives in their hands. Someone cast a spear and it struck near his horse, frightening it. But he turned the horse as it reared, plunged through the underbrush, and escaped.

"When he came back to his party he made no note of the incident or of the image, as he had taken a fancy to the bronze devil for which he had risked his life and wished to take it home with him without possible interference from the authorities. When he left the country a short time later he smuggled the image out with him.

"As he finished telling me this story my father brought the bronze devil from a box where he kept it and showed it to me. I have never seen another image quite so fantastic as this. Its evil leering grin was so malevolent as to make one remember the evil face for many days afterwards.

"My father stated plainly that the image seemed to be exerting some strange influence over his mind and actions. After he told me this I urged him to get rid of it, but he would not hear of that.

"Soon afterwards we built a house here. He gave particular attention to fitting up the basement in an unusual style. He fitted up rooms which you would expect to find only on the upper floors, a library, a billiard room, even a bedroom for himself, for, as I have intimated, he seemed to be in great fear of something. Apparently his idea in building these basement rooms was to hide and to have a refuge in case of a possible attack.

"There was one room he fitted up which he would never allow anyone to enter, not even myself. At first he liked to have me down in the basement rooms with him, playing billiards with him or reading to him in the library. But toward the last he took to spending most of his time in this mysterious room.

"One day I was on the first floor when I heard a scream from the basement. I ran down the stairs. I ran through the lower rooms and I saw nothing of my father. I came to the door of the room which I had never been permitted to enter. It was partly open, and without hesitating I ran into it. It opened into the fantastic shrine you saw last night, which you entered to grapple with me.

"Before the altar railing beneath the two great bronze gods with their four glaring eyes my father was kneeling, a look of mortal fright on his face. I ran to him and helped him to his feet. I asked him what was the matter.

"He said that just a moment before he had felt, rather than seen, behind him a tall priestlike Hindoo standing with arms folded, gazing at him with evil, vindictive eyes. The sight of the menacing figure had been such a shock to his overwrought nerves that he had screamed, and with the scream the Hindoo form had vanished.

"I did not believe there was any foundation in fact for his story. From the evidence of the fantastic shrine my father had fitted up I felt sure that his mind was becoming unbalanced by preying over the stolen image. I think that my father suspected something of this sort himself, for when I now urged him to get rid of the bronze devil he promised at once to do so immediately. I cannot say for sure whether he did or not, for . . . ."

The girl hesitated and stopped as if in distress.

"Yes? What was it?" I prompted gently.

"Two nights later my father was killed—stabbed in the heart in the library of those basement rooms. I found him lying on the floor in the morning with his hand clasped to the handle of a knife protruding from his breast."

There was a hint of tears in the girl's voice as she made this startling statement.

"I am sorry," I said sympathetically, involuntarily shuddering a little.

8

After a moment the girl went on.

"The police called it suicide, but I never believed so. I think that someone stabbed my father and left the dagger in his breast, and that as he died my father put his hand to the handle of the knife in an involuntary effort to withdraw it. I told the police what I thought. I also told them the story of the image and of the strange influence which it had seemed to exert on him. I told them of the tall Hindoo form which had seemed to appear behind my father in that strange room. The room itself I did not show them, as I did not want them to think he was crazy. The bronze devil I would have showed them, but I could find it nowhere."

"Perhaps it was stolen," I suggested.

"It may have been, but I remember my father's promise. I think he

either hid the image or gave it to someone to keep for him."

"That is more likely," I conceded. "But what has developed since?"

"Only this. I have been persistently haunted, hounded, by a nameless thing which has only eyes, terrible evil eyes. Two weeks after my father's death the phenomena started. I was in my room at night in bed. It was dark. The curtain was raised at my window, but there was no moon, and practically no light entered.

"I had been asleep, but I suddenly awoke as if startled. I looked toward the door and saw two eyes, glowing like red coals of fire! I was frightened.

"Then I thought of cats. I knew a cat's eyes would glow in the dark. Though I had no cat I felt sure after a startled moment that it was a cat sitting in a chair looking at me.

"There was a stand near the head of my bed with a book on it, which I had been reading before I went to sleep. I suddenly reached out a hand, seized hold of the book, and cast it with all my strength at the two glowing eyes. I hate cats. I am afraid of them.

"My aim was true, apparently, for I heard the soft thud of the book striking some yielding body. Then I heard a low growl, angry, hair-raising. A growl, you hear. Do cats growl?"

"I have not heard so," I replied with sudden apprehension, looking about me.

"Then the eyes flamed once and disappeared. After a moment I got up, found the light switch at the head of my bed, and turned on the lights. There was nothing in the room. The door was closed. I crossed over and locked it. I did not go to sleep again that night.

"Since that time there has not passed a week but that I have seen the eyes, sometimes at my door, sometimes at the windows. Locks or shutters do no good.

"The influence those eyes have exerted upon me is terrible. I have been hypnotized. I have feared nameless fears during the day, and at night felt myself doing things terrible. Upon awaking in the morning I know I have done something while my consciousness slept, something frightful, maybe, possibly crime, murder. I have a memory of two eyes driving me, ordering me. But no consciousness of anything done remains in my mind.

"Until last night when you intervened I had no knowledge of what I was doing. Then it was as if I had just awaked and remembered a dream."

"You mean," I whispered, "you mean that you were—out of your senses when you were creeping into that room with the knife in your hand?"

"Yes," she breathed. "It was you that waked me, your will that seemed to free me from a dreadful spell. But who knows what terrible things I have done before this, how many times I have raised that knife when no one intervened! Oh, it is terrible! What is it?"

"Hypnotism," I said, taking her hands in mine and looking into her face searchingly.

"I do not know," she said hopelessly. "If that were so, what could I do?"

"Something must be done," I replied. "You must let me come, watch at your door. I have a pistol. I am a good shot. Or the police. . . ."

"Oh, the police! Don't you see? They would just say that I am crazy, that my father was crazy. Am I crazy? Do you think so?"

"No," I asserted. "You are perfectly sane. I have seen crazy people and I can see from your eyes that you are not crazy. You must let me protect you from this fiend."

"No. I am afraid. It—the thing would kill you."

"But this can't go on. It must stop."

"Yes, I know, but—look!"

The girl suddenly clung to me and pointed to the door through which we had just entered, with a shaking hand. I looked where she pointed. I saw nothing immediately.

THEN I saw it. Two eyes glowing out of the partly opened door, the door which the girl had closed securely behind us. Two flaming eyes, terrible, menacing!

The girl pulled away. She clutched my arm.

"Come!" she cried in a low voice. "Let us run! Run!"

I took her hand. We ran out through a door which the girl pulled open before us, pulling it shut after us. Then we ran on and on, into intense blackness. The girl led me. I did not know where we were going. After a while we stopped. She held my arm, listening.

"Tell me," I whispered, "please tell me where we are, where I can find you should we become separated. Who are you?"

"I am—oh!"

She ceased speaking and I felt her body trembling against me. Confronting us, not twenty feet away, were two eyes, flaming red, live like coals of fire.

The girl tugged at my arm, tried to drag me away. But I held back.

"Run! Escape!" I cried, pushing her from me. "I will fight, kill!"

She tried to cling to my arm.

"I am afraid it will kill you," she whispered.

But I put her from me and heard her footsteps retreating.

I confronted the gleaming eyes. I felt them boring deep into my own consciousness. I felt my knees shaking. I had a nameless terror. I felt my senses reeling.

Those eyes! I must destroy them! I must master them! Though they scorch me I must extinguish them! They made me mad, those eyes! I was crazy! I would kill!

I took a step forward, my fists clenched. I would grapple with the unknown!

Then I heard a missile flying from behind me, heard it whirl over my head. I heard it strike something soft, yielding, heard it bounce to the floor and roll away like a billiard ball. I heard a low growl as of anger, pain.

Then for an instant both eyes disappeared. After a moment there appeared one red flaming eye. One eye! Only one! But it was belching, seething with a scorching fire. Then it started toward me!

Conquered by a nameless terror I fled, with the one eye pursuing. As I ran I thought that in my flight I was at least allowing the girl to escape. So I ran on and on.

I became giddy. My senses reeled. I became a floating thing without will or volition, which went tearing through frozen spaces, seething through the flames of hell, flying out through a world of hideous dragon-gods and devils, into quiet stillness, and finally to rest and peace.

9

I SAT before my study table, the bronze devil grinning at me in the light of the chandeliers. There was nothing unusual about the room.

I stood up, felt of my limbs. My muscles functioned as usual. I was perfectly normal, sane.

Yet that other scene was vivid, real. The pursuing eyes! The girl! It was she who had thrown the missile that had struck the thing, extinguished one of the eyes.

Where was she? Had she escaped? I must return and protect her from this terrible thing!

Return? Where?

I laughed. It was silly. It was idle. I was going insane, crazy. I must get my mind off this sort of thing or I would be in the asylum. I must go to bed, forget.

But I could not forget, and tossed restlessly, sleeplessly through the night, my mind a jumble of half-formed, fearful dreams.

The next day I went about my usual routine. I carried my lunch with me, as I had made up my mind to spend all the time until dark in my search of the cliffs. All morning and until late afternoon I scrambled about among the rocks, striking here and there with my pick, climbing on precarious footing along the cliff-wall.

Along toward dark, cutting away some scraggly brush from the side of the precipice, I found a small opening in the face of the rock. Digging excitedly about with my pick I widened this opening until it was large enough to permit entrance of a man crawling on hands and knees. When I had made the opening as wide as possible with the tools at hand I threw aside my pick and, getting to my knees, thrust head and shoulders into the hole. I took my flashlight from my pocket and sent a glow of light ahead of me into the intense darkness. For a short distance I could make out the walls of a passage on either side, but ahead of me the revealing light faded away into blackness without a sign of an end to the cavern. The floor seemed to be about ten feet down from the entrance, making the height of the chamber about twenty feet.

I had a great desire to explore my discovery immediately, but it was fast growing dark and I had quite a distance to make over precarious footing until I reached safe ground at the top of the cliffs. Accordingly I left further explorations to another day and started out on my return journey while I yet had sufficient light to make it in safety.

The sky had been cloudy all afternoon, and before I reached town there had come on a spattering rain. It was dark before I reached town. As I passed the lighted doorway of the Hindoo shop the thought suddenly occurred to me that I had only two cubes of incense remaining. I should have some more. Whatever the strangeness and terror of my nightly dream, I wished it to be repeated until I should either bring this beautiful dream-girl into reality or at least satisfy myself that there could be no basis in fact for her existence. However much I might laugh at myself for it, I knew that I had fallen in love—how hopelessly I was only too well aware. If she were a dream, it was only in dreaming that I could be happy, and there was no doubt in my mind that the dream was in some way the product of the burning incense.

I entered the shop rather fearfully. The proprietor was in. He faced me across the counter.

"Something, sahib?" he asked, his reddish-brown eyes pleasant enough.

"Some incense," I said. "Some of the rare kind you gave me before. You remember?"

"Yes, sahib."

He turned away and searched behind him on a shelf. While he was doing so I looked toward the rear of the shop. There was no sign of the huge idol that had confronted me the day before. There was nothing at the rear of the shop but a number of tall, innocent-looking packing-cases. I felt the Hindoo's eyes upon me again, and I turned to face him.

"I have no more," he said; "only sandalwood."

"But I don't want sandalwood. Where can I get the other?"

"You cannot get it," he replied, his eyes stirring into a dull, smoldering flame. "Do you wish the sandalwood?"

"No," I answered shortly, and turned on my heel.

"Your soul!"

The words from behind me were low, passionate, menacing.

I whirled as if I had been struck.

"My soul!" I cried, glaring at the East Indian, who stood facing me with arms folded across his breast.

"Your soul shall pay!" he snarled.

His eyes flamed an instant into mine, then the fire in them went out.

"It is just a saying in India. It means nothing. I only said my secret thoughts aloud. Pardon, sahib."

"Oh," I said; then I whirled and left the shop hastily.

I HURRIED through the dripping rain to the restaurant, where I dined, my mind trying to analzye the peculiar effect which the oriental had upon me. It did not take much thinking to convince me that the Hindoo was a thorough rascal. I am familiar with hypnotism and I have more than once had different persons try to exercise this power over me. I have experienced the numbing clash of a powerful will with my own, have felt my own mind struggle for mastery, never once to come out other than victor. So I knew that the East Indian had tried to hypnotize me, not only on this evening, but also on the first occasion.

"Your soul shall pay!"

That trinket that I had broken! Was all that had happened, the dream and all, part of his revenge? Had he created the beautiful girl in my mind just to torture me with her memory for the rest of my days? What a diabolical vengeance!

I returned to my house. I went immediately to my study. I sat down before the table and picked up the little oblong box. Tomorrow the box would be empty and then I would have it out with that evil red-eyed fellow.

I lifted the head from the bronze devil, and thrust the last two reddish-brown cubes of incense into the hollow body. I was feverish with impatience. I felt as the opium fiend must feel while he prepares his drug.

I lighted the two cubes, and for a moment two eyes gleamed. Then one cube went out and I had to light it again. It did not burn well, but I got it to going fairly.

I put the head back into position. I watched smoke belch forth from the grinning mouth. I watched the two pinpoints of red, one intensely bright, the other smoldering, dying.

As I stared at the grinning face of the bronze devil a thought occurred to me. The face, the whole figure was familiar as if I had seen it somewhere. No, I had only heard of it! If I could just think a moment I could remember all. Why must my mind wander? Oh, yes. My soul! The Hindoo would have my soul! No, he would not! My soul should run from him so fast he would not be able to catch it!

The world became full of aromatic smoke. My senses dulled. My soul ran flying out into a pelting noisy space, through the gates of hell, where long-tailed devils struck at me, into the white heat of torment, through the icy cold of despair, and then into a haven of rest and comfort.

10

I SQUATTED before a door in the darkness. I had an automatic in my right hand. I was also conscious of something clasped in my left hand. I was waiting, watching, every sense alert.

There was someone in the room before which I waited. This I knew. I was not afraid. My arm was steady. My aim would be sure.

A half hour passed, perhaps more.

Then a scream from beyond the door. A sudden scream of fright, of mortal terror.

I was on my feet, shaking the door, which was locked. I heard the scream rise again.

I laid the object clasped in my left hand carefully down near the door. I thrust my pistol into my belt. Then I ran back a few feet, turned, and lunged forward with all my weight upon the door. Once, twice, three times. At the fourth lunge the lock broke and I went hurtling into the room.

Lights flamed from chandeliers overhead.

Facing me stood the girl in shimmering white night clothes. Behind her was a bed just vacated, while to the right were chairs, a dressing table, articles of ladies' wearing apparel.

Her hair was disheveled, her eyes were large with fright.

"You screamed," I said, looking at her, thinking more of her great beauty than of the dangers which her cry of terror might signify.

"You!" she cried.

She came to me, clasped her arms about me, clung to me like a little child.

"Tell me! What was it?" I insisted, putting an arm about her and patting her shoulder reassuringly.

"The—the thing!" she whispered. "The eyes! I saw them at the window. I heard the window opening, saw the eyes looking in. I screamed, sprang from bed and turned on the lights. Then you came crashing at the door, came plunging in. How came you here?"

"I said I would come, would defend you," I asserted, looking into her blue eyes and searching them for a sign of an answering love in their depths.

My gaze was so ardent that the girl's eyes fell before my own. Suddenly conscious of her dress she pulled away from me, picked up a silk robe from a chair, and gathered it about her hastily.

"Where was it?" I asked, as she looked up at me again.

"There."

She pointed at the window at the foot of her bed. I started toward the window, and as I did so she put a hand on my arm and clung to me. We took half a dozen steps across the room.

Then there was sudden darkness. Intense, terrible, menacing!

"The lights!" cried the girl in my ear. "It has put out the lights! The thing! See? At the window!"

I put my arm about the girl and held to her convulsively. One flaming red eye, hot and intense as a living fire! And beside it the wavering glow of another eye, less intense, but deadly!

The eyes were moving, coming nearer!

The girl pulled out of my grasp, put both hands on my shoulders and shook me.

"Let us run! Flee!" she cried.

"I will stay! Fight!" I muttered, trying to shake her off.

But she put both hands upon my arm and forced me to run with her out of the room. Outside the door I stopped, groped in the darkness, and picked up the object I had laid down a few moments ago. Then the girl pulled me on. Swiftly along a carpeted hallway, down a broad staircase, across a wide room, stumbling past chairs and tables, through a second room whose door was wide, all in the pale light cast through windows from a cloudy sky outside.

We came to a flight of steps leading down into blackness. Down it we plunged together. I missed a step and went tumbling, rolling down the remainder of the flight. The girl came running after. She helped me to my feet, and we ran on again.

After a while we stopped. The girl was exhausted. I heard her panting. I put my arms about her and held her. She clung to my shoulders with both hands.

"Where are we?" I asked after a moment.

"In my father's basement rooms. We are in the billiard room, I think. Ahead of us is the shrine. There is something strange in there, back of the images. Last night when you fled with the thing after you I followed a little way. I saw you run through the shrine-room, around the platform to the rear. I waited a moment but I saw nothing else enter. Then I ran after you. I came to the rear of the platform, where was a hissing, bubbling spring of hot water. Back of the spring, I saw a dark, square opening cut through the solid concrete. I looked through it. I could hear your footsteps retreating in the blackness beyond, and in my fright I was tempted to follow you. But I feared that the thing was still behind me, that it might overtake me in the darkness of that subterranean passage. What is back of that opening?"

"I do not know," I said, and told her all I knew, of the Hindoo shop, of the incense, and of my strange sensations.

"Is this a dream?" I asked. "Are you real or only fancy?"

"I am perfectly real," she replied. "But it is all so strange. Can there be some connection between the Hindoo you mention and the vindictive, priestlike form that threatened my father? May not the two be the same? That black hole behind the shrine platform may open into a passageway leading to the shop you mention. He may have entered through this passage, come upon my father and stabbed him for the image. But the eyes! What other eyes are there which glow in the dark, besides a cat's?"

"A wolf's eyes would glow in the dark," I replied, looking about me into the darkness apprehensively.

There was no sight nor sound of anything else living in the room other than ourselves.

"Come. When we get where there is light I have something to show you."

Groping about for the light switch, we came to a door, and we passed through it. My fingers touched the knob of a switch and I turned it.

Lights flamed out at us from four eyes above our heads. We were in the shrine-room. After a moment of accustoming ourselves to the glare we smiled at each other for encouragement. To our ears came a faint hissing from the springs behind the images, but knowing what made the sound we were not afraid.

Then I held up the object I had been carrying in my hand. It was the devil-incense burner.

"The image!" gasped the girl. "Where did you get it?"

"I received it as a gift about a year ago," I replied. "I converted it into an incense burner."

"Who gave it to you?" asked the girl breathlessly.

"Mr. James Brandt," I replied. "He was an old friend of mine."

"It was you," she whispered. "He gave it to you! My father!"

"You are—Miss Brandt?"

"Lenore Brandt," she replied, smiling. "But we are not safe here. I do not know why I came here, except that you escaped this way before."

"Now that we are here we will investigate that passage. I am not going to let this night go by without coming to the solution of this mystery. But first I want to talk to you."

I took both of the girl's hands in my own, and then continued.

"We may become separated. I may never see you again. This is all so strange that no one can just tell what

might happen. If we never should meet again, after tonight, I want you to know that I love you. It may seem strange to you that after seeing you only three times I should love you, but that can be no stranger than that I should be here with you now. I do not expect you to love me yet, but may I hope that should we meet again under more favorable circumstances you might learn to care?"

She looked up at me and I saw tenderness in her eyes. She stepped close and put her two hands on my shoulders.

"I—I do not know," she said with a little catch in her voice. "It seems as if we two might be on the brink of eternity. It does not seem strange that you should love me. Nor would it be strange if I should love you. It seems that we may have but a moment to love. I would not ask that we waste it. Put your arms about me now and hold me tightly. I wish to love and to be loved for just one moment before some terrible force destroys us, or drives us apart. One kiss for eternity."

I had her in my arms, touched her soft lips to mine. I felt her cheeks, wet with tears. She was crying quietly. A moment I held her and we clung together, then interruption.

We heard a low click behind us and the room was plunged in darkness. Looking over the girl's shoulder I saw two eyes glowing from the darkness near the door. The girl looked almost at the same time.

We turned almost as one and ran into the darkness where we believed the raised platform to be. It was the girl's arm which guided me around the altar railing, back of the platform; it was she who stopped me.

"Here! The passage!" she whispered, drawing me down to my knees.

She crawled quickly through a narrow hole, and I after her. As I came through upon uneven stone she took my hand and helped me to my feet. Then we ran quickly out into the darkness, feeling our way as we went. Stopping occasionally, we could hear a sound as of someone, or something, running after us.

After a time we came to a point where we could hear a faint trickle of water, which grew louder as we went on. As we approached the sound, the temperature became colder, until when the trickling waters sounded beside us the coldness was so intense as to chill us to the bone. We started to run, and soon it began to grow warmer. Warmer and warmer it became, and then hot. We now heard a sound as of escaping steam. We felt the stones beneath our feet hot as if in a furnace. A sudden thought came to me.

"The springs!" I cried. "We are beneath the hot springs. We are near the lava bed at the source of them. We are so near to the channel that the hot water and steam escape into the passage. And back there, where it was so cold, were the cold springs."

As we ran on, the heat became less, and soon we came to what appeared to be the end of the passage. Feeling about, I found that there was a door and, opening it, we came out into a small basement room.

The light entered from a square opening overhead, to which I could see a ladder leading upward. About the room were a number of images of all shapes and sizes, grotesque gods, evil, grinning devils, fantastic lion-men.

We stopped but a moment, then started for the ladder together. But I heard a sound behind me, and turned to confront two red eyes peering at us from the darkness of the passage. One eye was flaming brightly, the other smoldering dully. There was not time to escape up the ladder. I must fight the thing!

I felt for my pistol and saw that I had lost it when I fell down the stairway. I doubled my fists.

The eyes came nearer. I called to the girl.

"Run up the ladder! Quick! I am going to kill it, or die!"

Then I faced the thing. It came almost to the door of the small basement room. But I was impatient. I could not wait. I leapt forward and struck with all my might at a point just between the two flaming eyes.

I felt my hand strike flesh, which recoiled. It was real, then, not a ghost. So much the better. I knew how to fight real things, things which recoiled from a blow.

I still clutched the bronze devil in my left hand. I laid it aside on the floor.

The eyes still wavered before me, and about them I could make out the dim outline of a face, with the mouth open in an evil, yellow-toothed snarl.

I struck at that face again and again, and I felt myself being beaten severely. I saw the eyes flaming red, menacing, and gradually I saw their flame diminishing, the fire dying out of them. The blows struck out at me became weaker. They finally ceased, the eyes smoldered, and went out. I heard a heavy body fall. I had conquered it—the thing!

The girl! Where was she? I turned and saw her standing behind me. I ran to her, lifted her in my arms and carried her up the ladder, into the rear of a small shop.

The Hindoo curio shop! I knew it. And the proprietor? I did not fear him. I felt, I knew, that he was down below, unconscious as I had knocked him.

I set the girl on her feet and took her hand, and we fled out of the shop into a dripping rain. Her home was only a few blocks away, and she led me in that direction. We hurried to it, meeting no one, arriving there without mishap. Securing my automatic from the foot of the basement steps, I kept guard the remainder of the night while Lenore slept, or tried to do so. In my mind there was no fear, but in my heart was a great happiness.

11

The rest is soon told. In the morning we explored the passage, Lenore and I together. We found that a wide passage, evidently of ancient construction, led between the basement rooms of the girl's home to the small room beneath the curio shop. We found that this passage passed directly beneath the famous hot and cold springs. We also found other passages diverging from this one, leading into numerous great caverns. We followed one passage in particular for a great distance until it ended at a small opening on the face of the cliff-wall. This was the very opening I had discovered the day before.

But why go into the particulars of this wonderful subterranean city? You will find a full discussion of the cliff dwellers of central New Mexico and their marvelous cliff city in a recent scientific periodical, so that you may satisfy yourself with a full description at any time.

Orientals are not quick to forget or to forgive. When Lenore's father stole the bronze devil from the temple in India he became at once a marked man. Pursuit was immediate and unrelenting. Though the trail was long, it did not end for him until a dagger point had been thrust into his heart. It was probably by accident that the Hindoo stumbled upon the underground passage, and it is doubtful if Brandt ever knew of its existence.

Had I not entered the oriental's shop and broken an image, thereby earning for myself a curse, I should probably never have become implicated in the chain of vengeance. Unable to hypnotize me in the shop on my first visit, the Hindoo sold me a drug which numbed my will, making

me respond to his call, obey his will while the effects of the drug lasted. What he intended to have me do, what fate he thought to mete out to me, will never be fully known. He possibly thought to have me slain by the girl, or to have her slain by me. But my mind always struggled, gave defiance to his will.

Had not Brandt sent the bronze image to me, had he left it where the Hindoo could find it, no doubt Lenore would not have been disturbed. But when the image was not to be found, the East Indian first thought the girl had hidden it, and so hypnotized her and tried to force her to lead him to it. But she did not know where it was, and so was unable to lead him. But he persisted long, and in the end was successful.

The eyes? I know that it is unusual for human eyes to glow in the dark, but I have always believed that the Hindoo was more of a wolf than a man anyway. I am sure they were his eyes. Anyway they never bother us now, and it is very seldom that we think of them, Lenore and I. We are too happy in the present to think of the past.

The grinning bronze devil was never found. When I came to search for it in the basement of the curio shop the next day I could not find it. It was gone, and with it the curious images and the packing-cases, and with them the proprietor. I often think and wonder.

But even as I wonder I know that far away in a small temple in India a grinning bronze devil is clasped in the immense fists of a great savage god. I can imagine the god squeezing the small figure tightly, triumphantly, his eyes gleaming with the triumph of a chase well ended.

And on the platform before the great god, confronting a motley group of worshipers, I seem to see a tall Hindoo in flowing priestly garb, who looks out at his people with reddish-brown eyes, eyes which have a smolder in their depths, which often gleam as with triumph, and which can upon occasion belch forth two seething red tongues of flame.

THE WIND THAT TRAMPS THE WORLD

By FRANK OWEN

A gentle tale, sensuously delicate, full of sweetness and light and exquisite music. As the old Chinaman says in this story: "Anyone can hear a mountain fall, but only a genius can hear the music of a flower unfolding in the sun."

In WEIRD TALES Next Month

ON SALE AT ALL NEWS STANDS MARCH FIRST

A Tale of Stark Terror Is

The HOUSE of FEAR

By ALBERT SEYMOUR GRAHAM

A HOUSE of silence, broken at times by a weird wailing as from the Pit; a house of dreams, gray in the moonlight, under the leprous-silvered finger of the moon, brooding now, a grim, gray fortress of the accursed; the stronghold of the Beast.

Dense pines grew about it, and when the wind wailed among them, it met and mingled with an eery ululation rising as if muffled by many thicknesses of walls, to end with a quick shriek and a sudden hush, broken after a moment by the faint echo of a taunting laugh.

That laugh would have struck terror to the swart soul of a lucivee, if lucivees have souls, for it was like an eldritch howling, faint and thin; like the thin, tinkling laughter of a fiend, without pity and without ruth.

Here, in the sanitarium of Dr. Helmholtz, there were secrets within secrets, walls within walls, downward as in Dante's Seventh Hades, and from this monastery of the hopeless, there penetrated, on occasion, outward from its battlemented walls, wild, frantic laughter; but there was nothing demoniac about it, because it was the laughter of the insane.

But that other laughter, like a sound heard in dreams,—passers-by, if there were any such, hearing it, would shudder, and pass on. For the secret of that house of doom was terrible and grim; a secret, for him who might have guessed at it, to be whispered behind locked doors and with bated breath. And there had been those who had whispered of the lost souls within those walls; and the whisper ran that they were, indeed, madmen who had not been always mad, but had become maniacs after their commitment to the bleak house within the wood.

IN A bare cell, six feet by six—a cubicle in which there was barely sufficient head room for a tall man to stand upright—a figure stood with its hand clenched upon the bars, staring outward at the grim wood visible to the south.

Carrold Baron, banker, had abode here in this living tomb three weeks; say rather, three centuries, in which, as in a nightmare of cold horror, he had been aware merely of a face, three-pointed, bearded, the eyes active with a malign intelligence, the lips smiling always with the cold smile of death.

Twice a day the small panel in his cell door had slid backward without sound, to frame, in the opening, the face of Dr. Helmholtz, like a face without a body—and without a soul.

Carrold Baron, banker, knew that it was not a dream that would pass, because, on the second day, the head had spoken. Baron was scarcely a coward; he had fought like a baited grizzly when surprized in his house by the men who had brought him under cover of the night, to this prison house. Now, at the voice, like the slow drip of an acid, Baron stared straight before him, with the gaze of a man who has abandoned hope.

"My dear Mr. Baron," the voice had whispered, "the little matter of that check, if you please . . . you will make it out to 'cash' . . . Ah, that is good; I perceive you are—wise."

It had not been the pistol in the lean, clawlike hand; nor even the eyes, brooding upon him with the impersonal, cold stare of a cobra; Carrold Baron might have refused if it had not been for the sounds that he had heard and the sights that he had seen when, taken at midnight from his cubicle, he had beheld the administration of the cone. And, like Macbeth, with that one sight, and the sight of that which came after, he had "supped full of horrors," until now, at the bidding of that toneless voice, he had obeyed. Three times thereafter, at the command of his dark jailer, he had paid tribute; nor had he been, of all that lost battalion, the single victim, for there had been others.

Now, separated from him scarce a dozen feet, a girl with golden hair sat, huddled, eyes in a sightless staring upon the stone floor of her cell. Like Baron, she had not been mercifully killed; she had been saved for a fate unspeakable, beside which death would be a little thing. So far she had been treated decently enough; her cell was wide and airy, plainly but comfortably furnished; but as to that look in the gray-green eyes of the Master of Black Magic she was not so sure.

There came a sudden movement in the corridor without: a panting, a snuffling, and the quick pad-pad of marching feet. The girl, her eye to the keyhole of the door, could see but dimly; she made out merely the sheeted figures, like grim, gliding ghosts, and a rigid figure, on the stretcher, moving silently on its rubber-tired wheels. Then, at an odor stealing inward through the keyhole, she recoiled.

That perfume had been sickish-sweet, overpowering, dense and yet sharp with a faint, acrid sweetness: the odor of ether. And then, although she could not see it, a man in the next cell had risen, white-faced, from his cot, to sink back limply as the dark hand, holding that inverted cone, had swept downward to his face.

CARROLD BARON sprang to his feet as the narrow door swung open, to press backward against the window-bars as the high priest of horror, followed by his familiars, cowled and hooded, entered with a slow, silent step.

The doctor spoke, and his voice was like a chill wind. "My friend, I bring you—forgetfulness. . . . A brief lethe of hours. . . . And then, ah, then, you will be a new man, a man reborn, my friend. . . Now. . . "

Baron, his face gray with a sort of hideous strain, stared silent, white-lipped, as, at a low-voiced order, the attendants came forward.

The lean hand reached forward; it poised, darted, swooped, and in it was the cone. A choked gurgle, a strangled, sharp cry, penetrating outward in a vague shadow of clamor; and then silence, with the faint whisper of the wind among the pines, the brool of the rushing river, the faint, half-audible footfalls passing and repassing in that corridor of the dead.

ONCE—and it was never repeated—a man came there from the capital; he had demanded to see the doctor's patients. And as the investigator stood there viewing with a faint, creeping horror the nondescripts paraded before him, gibbering, mouthing, in an inarticulate, furious babble,

a man had burst suddenly from the line with a strangled cry:

"Frank—don't you know me? I'm Baron—Carrold!"

The voice was the voice of Baron, but the face—it was the face of another, totally unlike; there had been no possible resemblance. But the man had been—sane. The investigator was persuaded of that; he was suffering under a peculiar delusion, indeed, but sane.

The man rushed forward then, baring his arm; and there, on that thin, pitiful flesh, which had once been healthy and hard, there ran a curious design in red. The investigator sucked in his breath as that telltale birthmark sprang, livid, under his gaze, for he had seen it before.

The doctor's eyes narrowed to slits; somehow the man from the capital gained the impression that it was the first time he had seen that mark. But the investigator could do nothing. Birthmarks can be duplicated. He waited then, in a curious indecision, as the bearded doctor interposed suavely:

"Well, of course, commissioner, you're quite aware, or you should be, how it is; these paranoiacs are noted for their delusions: they believe themselves to be—someone else, and always a bank president, say, a famous actor, an author, a great general . . . Now—Mr. Baron—you knew him, I believe?"

Beneath the silken tone there ran suddenly a hint of iron, of menace, veiled but actual: the investigator felt it.

"This patient knew your name, of course," the suave voice continued. "Poor fellow—we must be gentle with him."

And there the matter ended. Curiously enough, the man who had claimed to be Banker Baron had, after that first burst of frenzied speech, kept silent. Perhaps that mordant gleaming in the doctor's eyes had telegraphed a warning, a message, a command.

Nevertheless, the investigator, still dissatisfied, took another walk through the corridors and determined to find the thing that seemed to be wrong. Corridor after corridor he traversed, and found nothing amiss. But while going through a last corridor, he saw a woman standing before a mirror, gazing into the face that appeared to her, and laughing, laughing, laughing; but there was no mirth in that laugh.

When the investigator returned, he looked at his own features in a glass, with the memory of that hideous laugh still ringing in his ears; he fancied suddenly beholding another's face where his own should be, and wondered—wondered whether that shock would not deprive him of his reason. For the woman he had seen, staring at her reflection in the glass, had had golden hair, pretty hands and an adorable figure, but—her face had been the rough, unshaven face of a man!

But nothing could be done. The woman might have been born with the features of a man, but the investigator doubted it. Nevertheless, personal opinions have no influence over law, and law sometimes upholds crimes that have never been brought to account.

The investigator went home, oddly shaken, to dream of a white face with staring eyes which changed, even as he gazed, into the face of his long lost friend, Carrold Baron; to hear, even in his dream, a voice, and it was the voice of the living—and of the dead.

No. 1

SERVANTS OF SATAN

by Seabury Quinn

THE SALEM HORROR

Author of "The Phantom Farmhouse," "Out of the Long Ago," etc.

WHEN the sightseeing 'bus from Boston carries tourists from the West and South through the crooked and historic streets of Salem, Massachusetts, the lecturer waves his megaphone toward a long, turtle-backed rise of land with the stereotyped announcement, "On your left, ladees and gentlemun, is the famous gallows hill where witches were hanged in the Colonial days."

Just that. A nineteen-word sentence, a craning of curious necks, a raising of perfunctorily interested eyes, and the cumbersome omnibus rumbles and bumps away on its homeward trip, leaving behind the monument of the most dreadful chapter in American history, a spot accursed to this day by the blood of innocent victims of fanaticism, a landmark bearing testimony to the terrible conflagration kindled by the effort of a bigoted, ignorant, self-righteous man to reassert his sway over the community and retain the pitiful salary of a parson in a small and none too thriving Colonial church.

LET us push back the hands of the clock two and a half centuries: Salem Village, small, but even now prosperous, clings to the rocky promontory jutting Europeward into the Atlantic Ocean, a few substantial houses of clapboard, fewer mansions of brick, brought as ballast in ships from England, and a foursquare, white-doored church. Four men, heavily cloaked against the shrewish October wind, stride determinedly through the narrow, unpaved street, talking earnestly. They are Joseph Parker, Joseph Hutchinson, Joseph Putnam and Daniel Andrews, all freeholders in Salem Village, appointed at a recent town meeting to consider ways and means for adjusting the controversy raging between the Reverend Samuel Parris, pastor of Salem Village Church, and his congregation.

Two years before, the Reverend Mr. Parris was called to the pulpit of Salem Village Church in an effort to heal the dissension cleaving the congregation. In settling in his position the reverend gentleman drove a hard bargain with his people, extracting in pay the last brass farthing the congregation could raise. Since his installation he has intrigued continually for greater power in the community. Failing to secure a deed to the parsonage property in his own name, he has set one faction of the

congregation against another, taking sides first with one side, then the other, till the little band of worshipers is torn to pieces with factional strife.

From the window of his study in the manse, Mr. Parris sees the four selectmen striding down the street, and his sallow face reflects the misgivings his heart feels. These men, substantial citizens all, are not to be browbeaten or bullied by any clergyman, no matter how thunderous his words or violent his temper. They will surely suggest the emptying of his pulpit as the only means of settling the controversy.

Something must be done; a means must be found to unite the people in one common cause and divert their dislike from their pastor. Love? No, the Reverend Mr. Parris' religion knows no love. He is a Fundamentalist of the Fundamentalists, and, like his modern brethren of the same school, finds his favorite passages of Scripture among those which tell of the dreadful vengeance of the Almighty. Fear? Hatred? Perhaps. Those emotions sway men—and women—more vigorously than anything else. But how; how?

The reverend gentleman takes up his great, cedar-bound Bible and opens it at random. Advice, if not comfort, is to be found in its pages. He reads intently by the waning afternoon sunshine, his long, crooked-nailed forefinger tracing the words as his eyes devour line after line. The twenty-seventh verse of the twentieth chapter of the Book of Leviticus: "And a man also or a woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death, their blood shall be upon them."

Mr. Parris closes the Holy Book and paces his study floor, his head bent, his lean, knotty fingers locked behind his back. He meditates the text he has just read—"their blood shall be upon them."

Among other household effects, the Reverend Mr. Parris owned two servants, John Indian, a partially civilized American aborigin, and Tituba, a halfbreed woman from the West Indies, part Indian, part negro. Like most West Indian slaves, this woman laid claim to a knowledge of voodooism, or *obea*, pretending to tell fortunes by palmistry and foretell the future by divination and communion with the spirits of the dead. Such things were roundly denounced and heavily penalized by the laws of the colony, which makes what followed doubly hard to explain.

During the winter of 1691-2, a circle of young girls and women began meeting at the Reverend Mr. Parris' home for the purpose of consulting Tituba and learning the secrets of palmistry and fortune telling. Those engaged in the forbidden pastime were Elizabeth Parris, age nine; Abigail Williams, seventeen; Ann Putnam, twelve; Mary Walcott, seventeen; Elizabeth Hubbard, seventeen; Susannah Sheldon, eighteen; Elizabeth Booth, eighteen; Sarah Churchill, twenty, and several others in their late teens or early twenties.

Mr. Parris could not have been unaware of these gatherings, or of their purpose, for two of the young women, Elizabeth Parris and Abigail Williams, were members of his immediate family, and all the séances were held in his kitchen. Nevertheless, it does not appear that he forbade Tituba to teach the black arts to members of his family and flock or denounced the unlawful assemblies to the authorities. On the contrary, he seems to have exhibited a mildness and tolerance entirely at variance with his usual habit and the custom of the times and community.

Winter ran its course and springtime came, and with it a remarkable sequel to the meetings at Mr. Parris' house. The girls and women who had studied with Tituba began behaving

in a most unaccountable manner. Some of them would creep under chairs, tables or benches; others uttered strange and unintelligible words and cries; still others indulged in spasms and fainting fits, choosing the most public places to display their seizures.

Simple home remedies failing to relieve the children's strange illness, the village physician, a Dr. Griggs, was called in, and after making an exhaustive examination of the patients gave it as his opinion that they were bewitched. This was quite in accordance with medical ethics of the times, which permitted physicians to make the devil the excuse for their own inability to diagnose a case or effect a cure.

The devil was no laughing-stock in the seventeenth century. He was a very real and personal fiend, devoutly believed in by all who called themselves Christians, and was ever on the watch for some unwary soul. All the world was a sector on which the forces of good and evil contended unremittingly, and, just as God chose His ministers, so the devil chose his to further his work among men. Holy Scripture declared there were such things as witches, and it was man's bounden duty, as a good follower of the church, to kill off the wicked brood wherever found. So it was in Salem Village in 1692, and the doctor's announcement of witchcraft set the superstitious people afire. The "afflicted" children, differing not at all from children today, proceeded to make the most of their position in the public eye, and acted more outlandishly than before.

ABIGAIL WILLIAMS, Mr. Parris' own niece, rose in church one Sunday morning and shouted to her uncle, "Now stand up and name thy text!"

All eyes were turned on her in horrified amazement; but Mr. Parris, who had never before been known to let a slight to his ministerial dignity go unrebuked, looked mildly at her, and announced his sermon would be based on the eighteenth verse of the twenty-second chapter of the Book of Exodus: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."

Sermons in those days were not gaged by the minute hand of the preacher's watch, but by the sands of an hour glass on the pulpit rail; and it was not till the glass had been twice reversed that Mr. Parris concluded his impassioned harangue. He traced the abominable crime of witchcraft from Biblical days to the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, ever reverting to his text and urging the congregation to perform their religious duty and put all witches to death.

At the conclusion of his discourse the little church was filled with an hysterical mob, ready to turn upon any suspected person and execute him on the spot. And the excitement was raised to fever pitch when one of the "bewitched" girls suddenly rose to her feet and cried, "Look where she sits upon the beam!"

"Who? Who?" asked the congregation excitedly, for they, of course, saw no one seated on the ceiling beams.

Another girl, also eager to be noticed, rose with a wild shriek and exclaimed, "There is a yellow bird sitting on the minister's hat!"

"Where? Where?" the bewildered people cried, for the yellow bird was, naturally, as invisible to them as the witch on the cross-beams.

When meeting was over, the children's parents pressed them to name the wicked persons who had bewitched them. But here the girls became vague, contenting themselves with rolling their eyes, uttering terrified cries and pointing distractedly at terrible sights, visible only to themselves.

The afflicted children were hurried to the parsonage, where their parents besought Mr. Parris to pray for them. Dismissing the elders, the minister locked himself in his study with the bewitched persons. At the end of an hour, he opened the door and announced the children had accused Sarah Good and Sarah Osburn as the witches who had cast the spell upon them.

Sarah Good was a poor, friendless old woman, subsisting largely on the charity of her neighbors. Sarah Osburn was nearing eighty years of age, and had been confined to bed by a lingering illness for several weeks.

Both of these hapless creatures were dragged to the church, where a tribunal of clergymen, hastily summoned by Mr. Parris, bullied and hectored them for hours on end. No third degree imposed by modern police ever approached the methods employed by these godly men in attempting to extort confessions from two distracted and friendless old women. But the prisoners stood firm in maintaining their innocence.

Then it was that Mr. Parris took counsel with the bewitched girls again, exhorting them to name some other witch responsible for their agony. Soon he returned with the scandalous intelligence that Tituba, his own slave, had been denounced by the "afflicted children."

Tituba was haled before the meeting, but her terror was so great that no intelligent answers could be extracted from her. She was paroled in the custody of her master, who promised his reverend colleagues he would reason with her and impress her with the error of her ways. Years later, when she had been sold to another master, Tituba, then an old woman, told of terrible beatings administered by her reverend owner, beatings merciless and unceasing, until she willingly agreed to confess herself a witch and implicate Goody Osburn and Goody Good in her confession.

Before a court composed of John Hathorn and Jonathan Corwin, the two leading magistrates of the neighborhood, assisted by Mr. Parris and several other eminent divines, Tituba gave her testimony. The devil, she said, had appeared to her and asked her to serve him. She agreed to do his bidding, and was told to attend a witches' meeting in a near-by wood. Together with Sarah Good and Sarah Osburn, she had mounted a wagon pole and been whisked through the air with the speed of the wind. In the heart of a deep, dark grove, the location of which she was unable to give, the devil awaited them in the form of a huge black man with one eye in the center of his forehead. She and the other two women had signed their names in his book with a pen dipped in their own blood, kissed him on an unusual part of his anatomy, and acknowledged themselves his servants forevermore.

All this time the "afflicted children" had been keeping up an incessant noise, screaming, groaning and writhing on the floor. When Goody Osburn's poor old hands twitched with nervousness, the children declared they suffered agonies, for she was pinching them. When Sarah Good brought her toothless gums together in senile terror, the shameless little wretches shrieked out that they were being bitten.

Poor, bedridden Sarah Osburn showed conclusively that she could not have attended any such meeting as that described by Tituba, for she had been confined to her home with illness at the time she was supposed to be attending the assignation. That, the court decided, was all the more proof of her witchcraft. Only a witch could be in two places at once, and, since Tituba had testified Sarah Osburn was present at the meeting

with the devil, and Sarah Osburn had shown she was home in bed at that very time—why, forsooth, she was in both spots at the same moment, and therefore, more undoubtedly a witch than ever!

TITUBA, Sarah Osburn and Sarah Good were sent to Ipswich jail as convicted witches, there to lie awaiting the hangman's convenience.

Exposure and the weight of the heavy iron fetters riveted on her wrists and ankles proved too much for Mrs. Osburn. She died in jail.

Tituba, because she had confessed, and especially because she had made the other two women's conviction possible, was granted a pardon and sent to Boston to be sold as a slave, where, it was supposed, she would fall into the hands of an owner who would take her and her power for working evil far away from Salem Village. Perhaps the fact that her removal would prevent her babblings from connecting the Reverend Mr. Parris with the inception of the witchcraft prosecutions might have had some weight.

Sarah Good lived to mount the gallows. As she stood with the rope about her throat, a clergyman said. "Thou art a wicked witch!"

"You are a liar," replied the old woman with spirit. "I am no more a witch than you are, and if you take my life God will give you blood to drink."

The second of Seabury Quinn's true tales of witchcraft will describe the accusations of evil made by our Puritan ancestors against Giles and Martha Corey, whose memory has been preserved in Longfellow's poem-drama. The spectacular death of the "stubborn wizard" Giles Corey beneath a beam, and the hanging of his wife Martha on Gallows Hill, belong to the darkest period of America's history. In WEIRD TALES next month, on sale at all news stands March First

Bitter Hatred, Romance, and Quick Poison Give Tang to This Tale of the New World

BRIGHT EYES OF ADVENTURE

By WILLIS KNAPP JONES

LEANING against the barred window, Celestina looked as far down the darkened street as she could.

"Still he delays, my lady," she commented, dropping the curtain back into place and looking around.

The fan of the Countess de Torre did not pause in its slow, languorous sweep.

"He'll come, never fear."

"Perhaps he has learned that you mean to—"

"Hush!" the countess commanded, slapping shut her fan. "Hush, Celestina! Our walls here in Peru are thick, but they have windows. And the spies of the viceroy are everywhere. He must not catch even a whisper of what awaits him."

The elderly housekeeper sighed and for an instant studied the countess in her black dress and high comb.

"You are very sure of your prey," she remarked.

"Very," the younger lady agreed, and then, as though she did not think longer of so unimportant a matter, she settled more firmly into place a tiny rosebud above her left ear.

"And yet, it seems almost a pity that he must be killed."

"Have I not told you to hush?" cried the countess with a tang in her voice that betrayed her tense nerves. "Do not dare to weaken. You have sworn—"

"Yes, and I'll keep my oath. I loved your husband—loved him when he was not cruel to you. That was why I vowed. Yet I can't help thinking of the viceroy, too. Did you notice him this morning, outside the cathedral when he stopped me to find where you lived? Not a finer man in all his train. He has no wife, either, and now that he seeks your friendship, who knows what may happen? To be the lady of the highest representative of the crown in New Spain is no small honor, my lady."

"Had it not been for him, I'd not be thinking of husbands now. He killed mine. He made me widow and I'll make him—"

"But he loves you. It was in his eyes for all the world to read today."

The countess drew herself up proudly.

"Loves? What has that to do with me? He did not love my husband."

"Nor did you. Often I have heard you confess that. Yet his death gilds his life and so you cry for revenge."

"Pride demands it, and the honor of the Torre family."

Celestina shrugged.

"Pride ruled the viceroy's actions, too. He was protecting the honor of Spain in her richest colony. If the count, your husband, had had his desire, Potosí would have become a free city, and that stream of silver that crosses Panamá to become the life-

blood of our nation would have been dammed at its source."

"Do the waters of the Rimac flow in your veins instead of blood?" demanded the countess angrily. "Would you have me fawn upon my enemy and crawl at his feet when he has killed my husband?"

"Whom you hated."

"Yet he was my husband, and above his dead body I swore to requite him. The dagger that hung from my husband's belt when he was arrested shall never be sheathed except in the heart of the monster who ordered the crime."

"Not monster, lady. There are ladies of our fair Lima who would give their lives for a smile from him."

THE countess smiled scornfully.

"For all his wisdom, that is one thing His Excellency does not know. To think he has never learned of that Inca poison so subtle that it paralyzes a man temporarily, yet leaves his mental faculties clear. And when he learns of it, it will be too late. Drugged by the wine, he shall be at my mercy. Then he shall learn another secret. Before his muscles recover from their temporary stupor, I shall tell him who I am, and after that, the dagger. His enemy's name shall be the last earthly sound in his ears."

"Still, it is a pity. There are so many other ways to seek revenge among woman's wiles. You might marry him, for instance."

"Go! You talk nonsense. I am determined."

"Careful, my lady. The very doors have ears, they say, and feet to spread the—ah!"

She stopped. She stared. The countess, following the direction of her gaze, saw a figure closely muffled in a black cloak, standing at the entrance. How long he had been there, they did not know.

But as soon as he was discovered, he bowed low, sweeping the long feather in his hat against the floor. Then, unlooping the cloak at the neck, he tossed it aside.

"A cloak is cumbersome, yet here in Lima often necessary, as necessary as these high boots that guard me against the mud of these, our streets."

He motioned to his leather boots with flaring tops that flapped as he took a step toward the countess.

"But why do you come disguised?" she asked, as soon as she could steady her voice.

Celestina, with a backward look at her mistress, picked up the cloak and carried it out with her.

"Necessity, fair lady. There are many of my friends who would gladly kill me, if they dared."

"And yet you come to my humble home through the dark streets and all their dangers?"

At the word, the viceroy tossed his head.

"Danger? I am always in danger. I live on it. It lurks in the bright eyes of adventure that lures me forth. It is the wine that spices my life."

"And do you not fear it?"

"I do not know fear. Though I have many enemies who threaten me, a threatened man, so runs the proverb, may still live to enjoy much bread. And so, *señora,* let us consider it no longer. But tell me rather what you thought when I sent my page to beg the favor of an interview this summer evening?"

"I thought—I wondered why the ruler of my country should stoop to notice a humble old woman like me."

"Truly you are humble, lady, if you think you are old. Or do you jest? Is it that you would have me quote the proverb, 'A woman is like a melon—to be sweetest, each must be fairly ripe'? But you prove its untruth. For you can have seen no more than twenty-eight springtimes, that I vow."

The countess looked at him shrewdly.

"How much do you know about me, you who claim you know nothing?"

"I know that you are beautiful, and beauty speaks a language so absorbing that other voices of the world go unheeded beside it. But tell me, what is your name? What shall I call you?"

"Does that matter?"

The viceroy shrugged.

"No, names are nothing; and yet it is my whim to have a name for you. I'll call you Rosa for the rose that nestles in your hair, and you shall call me José."

The countess, who had dropped into a comfortable chair, all red and gold, tapped on her knee with her fan.

"Another whim," she smiled. "One brought you through dark streets where danger stalks, another—"

"If love be timid, it is not true."

"Yet love should not be foolhardy, either."

A smile crossed the viceroy's face. "But I have a guard in this house that you know nothing about."

Try as she would, the woman could not conceal the start of surprize nor the quick glance of suspicion with which she swept the apartment.

"Oh, that is well. I was afraid your whim might prove dangerous."

"Perhaps. But danger is my whim, too. It thrills me. It keeps me alert. Sometimes my very life has hung on my alertness. Once I saved my life because I heard and interpreted a whisper in another room. Just a laugh that I knew ought not to be there made me take steps to protect myself. And once it was a look in a man's eye—my own servant—as he set a dish of *garbanzos* before me. I made him eat them. He died in an hour. And up to that moment I had trusted him."

"So you always take precautions? It is wise."

"Not always. Not here or now. You know the proverb: 'From him whom I trust, may God preserve me. From him I trust not, I shall preserve myself.' Yet why should we dally in such serious matters? Let me, instead, read a poem I wrote to you that first day I saw you, when by happy chance a rose from your hair fell before me."

"Willingly. But let me first call for wine. A friendly cup will make your words flow easier."

She clapped her hands and Celestina appeared. A word of command and the servant left the room to return almost immediately with a tray and two glasses.

The countess decanted the wine carefully from the cobwebbed bottle and gave one crystal goblet to the viceroy, who sat across the tiny serving table from her.

José lifted it to the light.

"A rare old vintage, that I know," he cried.

"Sealed ere Pizarro and his *conquistadores* sailed for this New World," she agreed.

He turned it, looking at it from all angles.

"Sealed in those old days when they had the secret of capturing the sunshine and the spirit of spring and imprisoning them in bottles. Nay, I swear it is almost the color of this ruby in my ring."

He tried to slip the ring off to show her, but it eluded his grasp and flew beyond her to the floor. The countess turned to look for it. As she did so, José emptied the contents of the goblet into his leather boot, then he raised the glass to his lips.

"Like a draft of the gods," he exclaimed.

She straightened up with the ring in her fingers, just in time to see him take the empty goblet from his mouth. An expression of triumph surged into her eyes.

"Will you have more, Excellency?"

"It sends a strange feeling through me," José commented. "I feel—I cannot tell how I feel—youthful and happy. No, I want no more. I want only to hear you talk to me, my Rosa, to read you my poem, to let you know I love you and to hope—" he was fumbling at his jacket—"to hope you love me, too."

He unrolled the paper and looked at it. Then he shook his head impatiently.

"Strange, strange," he muttered. "I feel—bewitched. As though gray vapors came between my eyes and the soul of me here set down in words. Are the candles growing dim or do I —bah! 'tis nonsense. Sleepy when I would be keenest."

"If it is sleep, Excellency, then just relax. It can be only a passing faintness. Perhaps a taste more of wine will clear your head."

"No," he said faintly, then, his words coming slowly, "Wine—never —clears—my—head. I—I—"

His head dropped forward on his chest. Like a shadow, the countess glided to a cabinet in the far corner of the room.

"At last!" she exulted, opening the door and stooping before it.

"But countess!" came a quiet voice which made her whirl, dagger in hand.

The viceroy, sitting erect, was motioning to her with one hand.

She backed against the cabinet.

"Countess, what is it you seek? Surely not treachery against one you invited to your house."

"Then you—you knew?"

He smiled easily.

"Did not your servant say the walls have ears? And do you think your threat against me would bury itself in your bosom?"

"Oh, brave viceroy!" she sneered. "No wonder you rant about your love of danger, no wonder you boasted of protection, you who were safe all the time. Well, call in the guard you have, send me to join my husband."

"But lady, these are not things I trust, protection and the guards outside. I have a more potent protector in this house than a regiment of my soldiers. Before they reached me, I might be dead a score of times. But with it, I am safe."

"What is this charm, the shield that makes a braggart of you?"

Before he replied, he toyed with the stem of the glass for an instant.

"And was this truly drugged, *señora?* And did I guess correctly that it would put me to sleep? I could only guess because I did not taste it. It is in my boot."

As she made no reply, the viceroy continued.

"Since you will not guess, I'll tell you what it is that makes me so sure you will never do me harm. I love you, I trust you, and so no harm will befall me here."

A burst of scornful laughter answered him.

"Trust? Fie! Trust with a guard of soldiers within call and two feeble women against you?"

"Lady, you mistake me."

He leaned earnestly toward her.

"See, I shall show you how I trust you. Here is the whistle with which I can summon my men. One blast upon it would bring them before its echoes died away in the darkness. And you shall take it."

He dropped it on the table before her. Still she sneered.

"How many other signals have you, should this fail?"

"None, I swear it. I have no other defense but the greatest of all, my love for you."

Seeing the disbelief still lingering in her eyes, he leapt up. "Would you have further proof? I'll give it to you. Any test you can devise."

Her only answer was to glance toward the bottle still standing on the table.

"To drink the wine?" he pondered. "I know you will not harm me, and yet—but wait! Why did you go for a dagger?"

He picked up the glass, smelled it, and tasted the edge with his tongue. "Ah, now I understand. You, too, know of the poison that the Incas gave their prisoners before they were sacrificed to the sun. How a woman does multiply complications! Well, I'll drink the wine. Fix it with your own hands, those lovely fingers that I long to touch. Hold it, yourself, to my lips and I shall drink the potion. Then shall you see how greatly I trust and love you, and you shall know your love for me."

"And would you do—that?"

"Pour out the wine, or, no—the poison lurks not in the bottle, for you drank with me. Then get the poison, if you wish."

Quickly she made up her mind and clapped her hands.

"Celestina, bring in another glass with poison in it as you brought the last. Go, woman! Don't stand there staring at me!"

"You see," commented the viceroy, "she doesn't believe, any more than I do, that you would work me harm."

The duenna returned before he could say more. In the bottom of the glass nestled a single colorless drop of liquid.

The countess bent over the bottle, hiding her actions from the man. In a moment she turned with a goblet in her hands. The viceroy, who had risen at her approach, sat back and smiled gently at her.

"I have perfect confidence in you, dear lady. My life I put in your hands. Let me first kiss the fingers that bring me the draft."

He caught one of her hands and pressed it to his lips, raising his eyes to hers as he kissed it. Then trustingly he drank the contents of the goblet which she held to his mouth with a hand that trembled so that he had to take hold of the goblet for fear she would drop it.

"And so you see, dear lady, my love for you. Because of it, I stake my fate, because my fate is linked by the stars, with yours. And yet, I have not read you my verses."

He tried to stretch out his hand toward the paper, lying on the table before him. But it was too late. He could not move.

"I trust you—lady—because—I—love—"

His relaxed muscles failed him. His jaw dropped, and for an instant there was a gurgling noise in his throat. Then his body stiffened. The goblet dropped to the floor and was shattered. But his eyes were fixed on her.

The countess stood looking at him for an instant, then, as if unable to meet his gaze, went slowly toward the cabinet where lay the dagger. She stooped, and grasping it in her clenched fist, returned to him. The viceroy had not moved. Rigid he lay, looking at her.

"Murderer!" she screamed. "You who killed my husband through treachery, poor deluded man who thought a family's honor weaker than a man's love—"

Her voice rose in intensity. "Don't look at me like that! I hate you, I say!"

She raised the dagger. Tensed, she poised. And yet the blow did not fall. His eyes were still upon her. She passed her hand across her face, then looked down at him. The weapon clattered to the floor.

"Oh, I can't," she sobbed. Then, "Celestina, run for an apothecary. Hurry, lest he die!"

She dropped beside him, hid her face on his knees, and sobbed wildly.

Author of "The Purple Death"

"IT SHOULD be within a few miles of here," said John Hunt. "The Arab from whom I got my information said it was near the well of Abul-Ala. And, if my reckoning is correct, the well is located in yonder oasis."

Billy Dean, American by birth, soldier of fortune by choice, veteran of the World War and constitutional daredevil, smiled serenely, touched a match to the inevitable cigarette and demanded: "But, Hunt, old man, is there such a meteorite?"

Hunt, phlegmatic Englishman, looked away across the burning sands of the desert.

"I think so. Al-Abu seemed to know what he was talking about. And he gave me explicit directions. He said the meteorite was seen, by a remote ancester of his, to enter the desert at a spot a few kilometers beyond the village of Hazad. His ancestor claimed to have seen the place where it fell in the oasis near that place.

"The tradition is that Al-Abu's family kept the spot in memory because, at that time, his ancestors believed it a fiery token from the god they worshiped—a sort of warning that the ruling dynasty, the Fatimites, was about to suffer extinction. The fact that in 1171 the Fatimites actually were overthrown probably strengthened the tribal belief that the meteorite possessed supernatural portent.

"But, be that as it may, the descendants of Fatima, daughter of Mohammed, have handed down from generation to generation the story of the flaming star that hurtled through the sky leaving a trail of fire behind it as it buried itself deep in the sand."

Dean looked skeptical.

"I hope you are right," he said, after a pause. "This trekking about over a red-hot desert on a wild-goose chase is not much to my liking. However, if you are right, if the meteorite did bury itself in the oasis over there, it won't take us long to unearth it."

Hunt shrugged.

"I am right. I know it is there. But don't, for one minute, delude yourself. The task of raising a stone, tons in weight, is not going to prove a sinecure. My instruments will locate it. But they will not dig it up!"

Dean blew smoke rings and looked at the top of the tent beneath which he sprawled.

"Admitted," he grinned. "But what of these damned blacks—can't they get it out?"

The Englishman looked serious.

"They can—if I succeed in keeping that devil, Abu-Rashid, away from them. He, you know, has learned, somehow, of our quest. And he, as full of superstition as a hound dog is of fleas, has set himself to frustrate our plans, simply because he and the rest of the Bedouins believe some deity threw it there."

For a time the men smoked in silence. Dean spoke first: "When did you last see Abu-Rashid?"

Hunt moved uneasily.

"Yesterday, at dusk, when you and the blacks were beating up a waterhole. He came tearing into camp on a camel and as good as ordered me to go back" (Hunt bit his pipe-stem savagely) "as good as told me to quit—now—after all the grilling agony of the past months. Now, when success is sure—"

He broke off abruptly and sprang to his feet.

"Look!" he cried excitedly. "Unless it is a mirage, I see a train of camels creeping over the sand, there, this side of the well of Abul-Ala!"

Dean raised his immense bulk from the sand, joined his companion and looked in the direction indicated.

"It's no mirage," he said tersely. "Camels, a lot of 'em."

"Is it Abu-Rashid?" Hunt grated.

Dean ducked beneath the tent-flap, reappearing almost instantly with a pair of field glasses in hand. Hurriedly adjusting them, he swept the plain.

"Yes," he answered, after a brief survey; "it's the sheik himself, and about fifty henchmen."

The camels, amid a yellow dust cloud, drew nearer; soon, Abu-Rashid at the head of the train, mounted upon a dromedary, could be distinguished easily by the naked eye.

HUNT'S present perilous quest into the interior of Arabia had been actuated by the story of the wandering Bedouin, Al-Abu. The lucid though fanciful and highly embellished tale of the meteorite had captured the geologist's interest. During the World War he, Hunt, had carried arms in his country's defense. But at the close of the struggle he had set out, hoping, in the interest of science, to locate the stone.

With arms folded across his chest, eyes piercingly intent upon the bearded Bedouins, Hunt stood watching their approach.

Shortly the soft thud of camels' feet came to the waiting men. As the blacks caught sight of the Arabs they sprang up, chattering like monkeys, their apathy gone, action superseding the listlessness of the moment before.

Abu-Rashid and his cortège swept up, circled the camp and, with murderous spears upraised, came to a dramatic stop.

But the grandstand play of the desert men failed to intimidate either Hunt or Dean. The Englishman stood at attention, his gray eye vigilant for the treachery he expected.

Apparently the Bedouins' visit was one of peace. With a winning smile wreathing his clean-cut lips, only half hidden by the dense, black beard, the sheik spoke. "The blessing of Allah be upon thee and all who dwell in thy tents," he said in a musical, softly modulated voice.

Hunt and Dean bowed.

"The blessing of Allah be upon thee and all who dwell in thy tents," responded the Englishman. "Will the great one of Arabia honor my poor abode by alighting and partaking of my humble fare?"

Abu-Rashid vaulted from the back of the huge, evil-eyed beast and threw his spear upon the sand; his henchmen, like well-trained soldiers, followed his example. Hunt gave a crisp order to a black, who scuttled off to do his master's bidding.

"The visit of the great one of Arabia is, indeed, an honor," began Hunt. "I am overwhelmed at his

greatness and my own insignificance. The sheik possesses many camels. His tribesmen are strong and fleet. His spears are sharp and long."

Abu-Rashid bowed.

"All that the white ameer says is true. Abu-Rashid is a great sheik. He has many times the camels, the warriors and the spears which Ameer Hunt sees. This is but a handful. When Abu-Rashid seeks to destroy, he has but to raise his hand. There are those who run to obey the sheik of Rashid."

Dean, man of iron nerve, sat listening. The play of words between Hunt and Abu-Rashid was plain to him.

"You've got your work cut out for you, old boy," soliloquized Dean. "I've buddied with the Briton a long time and, I can tell you, scare isn't in his vocabulary."

While the American sat silent, apparently heedless of the talk going on about him, his eyes were everywhere, intercepting significant glances, ferreting out signs that passed almost constantly, though covertly, between the Arabs and the blacks who were busy preparing coffee and native cakes for the Bedouins.

When the food was ready the Arabs sat squat upon the sand and ate. At the conclusion of the repast, Hunt passed tobacco and then joined his guests in smoking.

When the pipe was finished Abu-Rashid arose.

"We depart," he said gently. "Tomorrow, if Allah wills, we hope to be given the joy of thy presence at the well of Abul-Ala. Until then, the ever watchful eye of Allah be upon thee."

With a cry each warrior sprang up, snatched from the pile his spear, leapt upon his mount and went rocking away over the desert amid a swirling cloud of sand.

Hunt turned to Dean.

"What do you make of it?" he asked.

Dean shrugged.

"There is but one answer. Either turn tail and make tracks for home, or prepare to fight."

He scratched a match and applied it to the cigarette his long, slim fingers had just rolled.

"Those damned niggers," he exploded, "are in touch with the old rascal, Abu-Rashid. I got hep to that. All the time he was shooting off that palaver about his own greatness I was keeping my eye peeled. I saw no small amount of signs pass between our blacks and Abu's men."

Hunt nodded. "I felt it. But because I knew the sheik was watching I had to pretend ignorance and leave the rest to you."

A troubled look crept into his eyes. For a few minutes he remained silent, then, abruptly, he spoke: "That invitation—what do you think of it?"

Billy Dean looked perturbed.

"I do not pretend to understand. Of course, it may be merely an overture to win your friendship, to dissuade you from going farther with your quest of the meteorite. I am beginning to tumble to one thing: the Arabs, that is, the followers of Fatima, look upon the huge chunk of iron as sacred. They will do anything, stop at nothing, to prevent the sacrilegious removal of the thing. I am beginning to feel a little upset about it. Not on my own account, but, Hunt, old man, is it worth the danger you are facing? These people are peculiar. Desert-bred, shut off from the broadening influence of the outside world, they are imbued with the belief handed down through the centuries that the thing is potent. Abu-Rashid is not a whit more advanced than his ancestor who, so tradition has it, witnessed the fall of that infernal meteorite that is scheduled to kick up hades for us. The meteorite is a part of their religion. They call it 'The

Burning Wrath of Allah.' And, because they believe it, as we would say, 'a direct dispensation of God,' they mean to keep it."

Hunt, a gray pallor upon his face, tamped tobacco into the black bowl of his evil-smelling pipe.

"Still," he said wearily, "it is worth all the risk I am compelled to run. That meteorite is of incalculable value to science. You are not familiar with geology. I have given the best years of my life to the study. It would avail nothing were I to go into extensive details. But, believe me, it is one of the greatest geological finds in history. I came into the desert to get that stone. I will have it—or never leave this accursed sand-waste alive. No black-skinned Arab cut-throat is going to scare me off!"

Dean nodded.

"I've nothing more to say. Only —I'm with you."

Hunt extended his hand.

"I knew how you'd feel. But, boy, I'm not asking it. If—"

Dean flipped a match across the sand.

"How about tomorrow's kettle-drum?"

"We'll go, of course," said Hunt. "We can not do less. And we may be able to pick up something of value."

THE CAMP of Abu-Rashid presented a scene of absorbing interest to Billy Dean as he and Hunt, guided by a swart Bedouin, approached the oasis whereon the tents of the Arabs were pitched. For the first time the American caught a glimpse of the home life and domestic habits of the desert nomads. The women, veiled and silent, piqued his interest.

Abu-Rashid, with the native courtesy and hospitality of the Arab, welcomed them to the village.

"Let the glory of Allah smile upon thee and thine," the sheik greeted them, and straightway began showing his guests about the oasis.

"We are here today and gone tomorrow," he smiled. "Perhaps not literally. But at all events our stay here is not long. When the herds eat all the herbs, we move on to another place. Move, move. The thing that you Americans" (turning to Dean) "call 'wanderlust' is born in us. We would die if housed as people are in the cities to which, Allah forgive me, I have gone up at times."

"I understand, now, why you have such a command of English," laughed Dean. "Travel is *eau de vie;* it keeps us young and our vision broad."

Abu-Rashid nodded.

"As you say, it is the 'water of life', he said. "And I have tasted some."

As the sheik talked they approached a well from which a young girl was drawing water. Dean, who in his boyhood days attended the village Sunday school, thought of the story of Rebecca. Because, from what the American could see of rounded arm and mischievous eyes, he judged that here, as in Bible days, was a woman "fair to look upon."

Abu-Rashid broke rudely in upon his musing.

"This is the well of Abul-Ala," he said. "It is old, very old. It was here before your Christ."

Hunt, though skeptical, expressed his wonder. But Dean, who was interested in that particular well only as it concerned the girl, looked bored. Abu-Rashid's next remarks, however, caused the American's eyes to brighten.

"Our women," said the sheik, "unlike the women of some other nations, are subservient to the men. My daughter, there, has been taught, from her infancy, man's superiority. Shahrazad is a dutiful child."

"Shahrazad," thought Billy. "A mouthful, to say the least. But, from

the twinkle in her eye, I believe she deserves it."

"We are a simple folk," continued Abu-Rashid softly. "We molest no one who has the wisdom to leave us in peace. But, to the meddler, to the one who invades our land to desecrate it—better were he dead. Our mercy is long suffering, but our vengeance is swift. Allah abides with us and strengthens our arm. Wo, wo, to the despoilers!"

Hunt looked his host squarely in the eye.

"That is a challenge, is it?" he asked evenly. "You, Abu-Rashid, know why I have come into the desert. You remarked, but a moment ago, that you had traveled. You intimated that you were a broad-minded man. If so, if you understand the motives of the outside world, why are you so bitterly opposed to my mission?"

The Arab's voice was but a silver murmur. Ignoring all but Hunt's last question, he answered: "Because you are sacrilegious. The Burning Wrath of Allah must remain hidden in the sand. Were it to be brought to light, a fiery plague would sweep through the land. Allah, Himself, buried it there to subdue its heat. It is just as hot today as it was when Allah cast it down. But, being hidden in the earth, it has nothing to feed upon. It lies there, its heart red and angry, waiting for some fool to sweep aside the smothering layers of sand, to let the breeze of heaven play upon it that it may again burst into flame and send desolation upon the earth. For ages the big ball of fire has lain where Allah, in his wrath, cast it. When time ceases it must still lie there. If any man seeks to disturb it, he courts death."

"Oh, but see here, Abu-Rashid," expostulated Hunt, "that is all tommyrot. There is no heat in that stone. It is merely a mass of what is known to science as meteoric iron. It was not thrown out of heaven by Allah. It is simply a fragment of some body revolving round the sun. Its flaming appearance was caused by its passage through the earth's atmosphere. Friction, not Allah's wrath, caused it to become luminous, fiery, as you say."

"You have heard," quietly replied the Bedouin.

"So," cried Hunt, losing patience, "the fiat has gone forth? Well, if there is such a meteorite in the desert I am going to find it, Allah notwithstanding!"

The face of Abu-Rashid became convulsed with passion. But it passed and Dean, ever watchful, marveled at the desert man's wonderful display of self-control.

The Arab pointed toward a tent.

"Come. Shahrazad is setting meat."

A constraint had fallen on the three men. Hunt, already ashamed of his flareup, sat moodily eating such food as the girl placed before him. Dean, because he was young and his blood red, was romancing with Shahrazad who, once, in setting bread before him, touched, with her slim brown hand, his own. Billy felt a pleasurable thrill go through him at the contact, and, raising his eyes, he surprized a smile in the dusky orbs of the Arab girl. Thus encouraged, the American smiled back and covertly nodded toward the well of Abul-Ala.

After the simple meal, the sheik and Hunt again renewed the subject of the meteorite. With all the power and knowledge at his command the Englishman endeavored to convert the Arab to his point of view, to win his co-operation. But Abu-Rashid was adamant. Science, geology, what were they as opposed to the will of Allah? Nothing—less than nothing.

The argument became heated. At its height Hunt missed Dean. He was not in sight. But, beyond the vision of Abu-Rashid, the Englishman dis-

covered his friend engrossed in conversation with Shahrazad!

Hunt stood up.

"Then," he said evenly, "I am to understand that you oppose me. That you, claiming to be an enlightened man, knowing the exact spot where the meteorite lies buried, will not, even in the cause of science, aid me?"

"Son of an infidel," cried Abu-Rashid, "thou hast spoken!"

He arose, clapped his hands and to the slave who answered gave an order in Arabic. Hunt, who possessed a working knowledge of the language, smiled, walked outside and called Dean.

"We, or at least I, have outstayed our welcome," he said. "Abu-Rashid has ordered our mounts."

The way back to camp was traversed in silence. Hunt, engrossed by thoughts of his open rupture with Abu-Rashid, had small stomach for words. Dean, too, sank into a brown study and rocked along on the camel, wordless. But, to judge from the whimsical twist of his lips, his musings were pleasing.

Far into the night Hunt lay staring out across the moonlit plains. Somewhere beneath that flood of silvery light a hyena howled eerily and a jackal pack yapped in answer. At the sound the Englishman shuddered. After a while he arose, lighted his pipe, and carefully reviewed the whole circumstance. In his own mind he knew that the story of the meteorite was true, that somewhere within, or at least near, the oasis where Abu-Rashid stood guard, the coveted aerolite lay hidden.

The Arab was wily. He had taken up his stand at the well of Abul-Ala merely to keep Hunt off. There were both water and pasturage in abundance. Months must necessarily elapse before the Bedouins would have to strike camp. It was, therefore, to be a game of waiting.

But Hunt could be subtle and patient, too. If all else failed he would, apparently, submit to the dictates of the nomad. Meanwhile there was Shahrazad, the dutiful daughter of Abu-Rashid. Perhaps Shahrazad—

Hunt rolled himself in his blanket and slept.

OMINOUS trouble clouds loomed large on the horizon. The first indication of Abu-Rashid's active interference came to light the day following the sheik's break with Hunt. It took the form of open revolt among the servants. But Hunt, old campaigner that he was, understood the working of the Arab's mind, and upon discovering his personal slave in close conversation with one of Abu-Rashid's henchmen, shot the black through the heart and ordered the body cast into the desert. That night, thoroughly subdued, the negroes sat silent, listening to the screams of hyenas on the desert.

The next night but one, Hunt surprized a Bedouin snooping about among the camels. With a round English oath the geologist slapped the Arab's face, and sent him scurrying back to his treacherous master with bullets kicking up the sand around his naked feet.

From that night Hunt and Dean divided the watch.

Hunt grew restless at the enforced idleness. By nature he was progressive. Action, though fraught with danger, was to him the spice of life. Therefore, when the moon, which had been at its full and shining all night, began to wane, when the darkness grew like black velvet and the danger of detection nil, Hunt, who had been maturing a plan, decided to put it into execution.

The lure of the Burning Wrath of Allah was tremendous. The thought of its nearness obsessed the geologist. As he left his own camp and stealthily negotiated that of the Bedouins, the

certainty that the meteorite lay hidden near the well of Abul-Ala grew.

Hidden by the almost Stygian darkness, Hunt crept about, dip-needle in hand, searching, searching for the shapeless mass of iron.

For several nights his reconnaissance netted him nothing. But one night as he crept about he sensed a presence. With automatic in hand he stood, scarcely breathing. For a long minute the suspense held, then, in perfect English, a girl's voice broke the silence.

"It is I, Shahrazad," she said softly. "I remember you. You are one of the two white-skinned men who came to our village. I heard you and Abu-Rashid, my father, talking as I set meat before you. I know why you are here in the desert. You want the Burning Wrath of Allah. Is this not so?"

Hunt's heart raced.

"Yes," he whispered; "that is my mission."

"Foolish man," she said, "if Abu-Rashid learns of your visit he will kill you."

"Perhaps so. But—one dies only once."

For a space Shahrazad remained silent, mentally digesting the remark. Then, abruptly, she spoke: "Where is the other one, he of the laughing eyes?"

Hunt smiled.

"I left him guarding the camp," he said.

Shahrazad, with the easy familiarity of a child, slid her hand into Hunt's. "I like him," she said frankly. "His eyes are as blue as the sky, and like the stars in the sky there is a twinkle in them. And his mouth! At the corners of his lips there is always a little smile which, before you know it, runs right into a laugh! His hair is as soft as the silkworm's web; and the little trick he has of tossing it back—oh, I love that, too!"

"For a desert-bred girl you seem to have a wonderful command of English," remarked Hunt, dryly.

"That is simple," she said in answer. "When I was quite small, a missionary joined our tribe, and because he liked me he taught me a great deal."

Hunt's keen eyes softened and he felt an uncomfortable lump in his throat.

Shahrazad, after a pause, resumed: "You want to find the me—me—" Her tongue faltered over the unfamiliar word.

"Meteorite," supplemented Hunt.

"Meteorite," repeated the girl. "If you do—what are you going to do with it?"

The geologist, simply, that she might understand, explained his reason for wanting to locate the aerolite, told of the museums where such things were kept, and of their scientific and educational value. Like a child listening to a wonderful fairy tale, Shahrazad drank in every word.

Then: "Does he, too, want to find this big iron rock?" she asked.

Hunt inclined his head.

"He shall have the stone, then," assented the girl. "Tell him to come with you to this place tomorrow night. I will show you the exact spot where the met—meteorite entered the earth. There is a mark that you can not miss. Then, when you know the spot, you and he must go away. Then no one will—will—"

She paused and knitted her brow, searching for the right word.

"Suspect?" suggested Hunt.

"That is it," nodded Shahrazad. "When we are gone farther into the desert, as we must when the camels and horses eat up all the herbage here, you can come back and dig up the big rock. When you come again, fetch the soldiers from Aden. You may need them."

She paused, and a sob caught in her throat.

"Shahrazad will not have to be here to see—him," she said softly. "But he won't forget."

Turning swiftly, the Arab girl disappeared in the shadows of the palms.

A HOT breath swept in over the plain, the advance guard of the simoom which was, even then, twisting the sand into swirling spirals across the desert. Watching through the glasses the progress of the storm, Hunt stood motionless.

"My God!" gasped the American. "This heat is the worst ever. If it gets any—"

Hunt, his face a gray mask, interrupted him.

"The blow will hit us in a few minutes. When it does see that your face is protected," he advised quietly.

Dean mopped his brow.

"Hope this little flurry won't annul our scouting party tonight," he growled.

"It won't. I promised Shahrazad we'd be there. And we will."

Dean, whose eyes had never left the oncoming sandstorm, caught his breath. The spectacle was stupendous. A solid wall of sand seemed to have arisen, and like a vast flood of yellow water it came hurtling down upon the camp.

Hours later, when the simoom had vented its fury, the adventurers crawled from beneath the protecting howdahs and reconnoitered the camp. The negroes, accustomed to the desert's vagaries, had suffered no mishap.

Night was closing in. Hurriedly the men ate the food prepared and set before them by the blacks.

Together they set out. The recent storm had drifted and piled the loose sand, changed landmarks and made travel almost impossible. But the dromedaries jogged onward without guidance on the part of their riders.

"Let them have their heads," advised Hunt. "Set your course by the stars."

Dean, in after days, could not say how long they were in making the trip. Hours passed slowly. Time seemed to stand still.

Hunt suddenly drew rein.

"We are almost there," he whispered. "Dismount—we will leave the camels here and go on afoot."

Stealthily they approached the oasis. Suddenly the date-palms growing about the well of Abul-Ala sprang out of the enshrouding gloom. Hunt laid his hand on Dean's arm.

"Stay here," he whispered. "There may be treachery. In the event that anything goes wrong, get back to camp and notify the garrison at Aden. There is no use both of us getting in bad."

"See here," angrily began Dean, "what do you think I am?"

Hunt's hand sought and found that of the American.

"Listen, buddy, we've been through a lot together. I'll never forget—France, and 'No Man's Land,' and the time you got me through the entanglements. You ask me what I think you are. Well, words, at a time like this, aren't much. But there's one that's about right. And that's—pal. And a pal never questions. He just goes on blindly trusting. Am I right?"

Dean's throat constricted. Tears smarted in his eyes. Ay, pals they had been. Pals they were.

"Yes," he said shortly; "you're right."

For a long minute hand gripped hand. Then, almost before he realized it, Billy Dean was standing alone, beneath the shadow of the palms.

For a long, long time he waited, but though he strained his ears for the slightest noise, not the faintest murmur of sound came to him.

Eventually the darkness thinned. Long streaks of flamboyant color spread upward across the sky. Dawn, rose and pearl-gray, came stealing over the desert. Stars paled, flickered

and died. In a few minutes the sun would burst forth, would discover to the Bedouins the American's hiding place.

Stiff, from long crouching, Dean rose and retraced his steps to where he and Hunt had secured the camels. They were lying down, long necks outstretched, and the faint hope that the Englishman had gotten back first left Dean and an icy chill of apprehension crept over him.

That day the American, gaunt and haggard from lack of sleep and the brooding horror of fear that flayed his soul, returned boldly to the Arab's village.

"Is Hunt here?" he demanded.

"The great ameer," lied the Arab. "has not been seen by thy humble servant."

Abu-Rashid's disarming smile and softly spoken denial almost convinced Dean—almost, but not quite.

"Where is Shahrazad?" parried the American.

Abu-Rashid's brown face grew ashen.

"My daughter is not here," he said sullenly. "And," he added angrily, "were she here it is not meet that a child of Allah should hold speech with infidel dogs."

The man's voice rose to a scream.

"That she, a lineal descendant of Mohammed, the daughter of Fatima, should seek to betray—"

The Bedouin broke off and flung his slim hands into the air. Dean, half insane from worry, wondered what trick the desert man was playing.

By an effort Abu-Rashid regained his composure.

"I think," he began softly, craftily, "were I in your place, Ameer-al-Dean, I would let the English meddler go. There are other lands more pleasing than the deserts of Nefud. I can not tell you where Ameer-al-Hunt is. I do not know. But, under Allah, wherever he is, he is paying the penalty of the profane."

He turned and pointed in the general direction of the American's camp.

"Go now. We will meet no more. And forget you ever heard of the Burning Wrath of Allah."

The next minute Dean found himself alone.

BENEATH the blazing sun, head throbbing, eyes bloodshot and smarting, Dean rode. There was but one thing to do and he was going to do it.

Reaching camp he gathered the blacks together, struck due southwest, and began his soul-trying journey to the coast. His destination was Aden. To get to the garrison in the shortest possible time was his determination. With the aid of the soldiers he meant to run down the Bedouins and rescue Hunt. But common sense told him that months must elapse before he could reach the city, obtain help and return.

There was, however, no alternative. Lone-handed he could do nothing.

The trek to the southwest coast was one long nightmare horror. By a thousand desert tricks Dean found himself outwitted, annoyed, constantly retarded.

As if the climatic conditions were not enough to break a white man's spirit, the devilish blacks grew insolent and unmanageable. In countless ways they balked and thwarted him—led him into culs-de-sac, wilfully went astray, doubled back upon their own tracks, until miles of the grilling journey were gone over numberless times, precious weeks lost, and the food supply alarmingly diminished.

Dean, suffering from desert fever and racked by apprehension as to Hunt's fate, grew cadaverous and almost insane.

At last, after months of anguish, Aden was reached. Dean went at once to the garrison, told his story to the commandant, obtained troops and,

though he swayed unsteadily in the howdah, expressed his determination of heading back into the desert.

"You are fit for nothing but the hospital," declared the company surgeon. "Stay here in Aden and let the troopers hunt Abu-Rashid. Man, as sure as the devil, you'll die if you don't let up."

"Then," said Dean, "die it is. Hunt and I were buddies—pals, if you know what that means. A pal never questions. He just goes on blindly trusting."

The feverish light of insanity gleamed in his sunken eyes.

"You understand that, don't you?" he demanded. "We were pals. And," he added hazily, "a—pal—never—never—questions. Just goes—on—blindly—trusting."

The doctor got him off the camel, took him to the hospital, gave him a hypodermic, and in three days he was well enough to go back into the land of heat, torrid sun, simooms and peril.

But the fear that racked the American never died. As he drew nearer and nearer the well of Abul-Ala a grisly hand seemed clutching his heart. Telling himself that it was a case of nerves did not banish the feeling. The dread, a nameless icy horror, burned in his brain, clawed, with reeking fingers, at his heart.

Coming one night to a tiny oasis, the tired caravan halted. The water jugs were almost empty and a week's hard journey yet separated the expedition from the larger and more fertile oasis where Hunt had disappeared.

The feverish light had come back to Dean's eyes. Looking over the desert, toward Abul-Ala's well, he would mutter: "A pal never questions. He just goes on—blindly—trusting."

These moods, however, passed. But he never smiled, and his face grew more leathern, more parchmentlike, more graven in its lines. His nerves were as taut as a bowstring.

"I am glad we are nearing the end," Dean told the captain in command. "If I had to endure much more I'd—well—I'd rather shoot myself than go—nutty!"

The doctor interrupted bruskly, "You won't do either. By this time next week we'll have Hunt safe and sound."

"Yes," said the captain, "and not only that. Old Abu-Rashid and his cut-throat mob will have to pay—dearly. He needn't think he can get away with such stuff as that."

Dean was cheered. That night, for the first time in months, he slept. Slept and dreamed that he and Hunt had located the Burning Wrath of Allah and that when it was excavated it was not the twisted mass of meteoric iron that they had expected to see, but a diamond so large and bright that the sun seemed dwarfed and dim in comparison. And, as he and Hunt were exclaiming at its wondrous beauty, it parted and Shahrazad stepped forth, bearing a goblet of water in her hands.

With a start he woke. From out the night had come a sound. He could not tell what it had been like, but it had sent sleep flying. He sprang up, tense, alert.

Again came the sound. A soft thud-thud. Then through the murky gloom came a scream, bloodcurdling, demoralizing. The hair on Dean's neck prickled. A great trembling seized him.

Again came the hideous scream, the soft thud-thudding of hoofs on sand, circling the camp.

Confusion reigned. In a heterogeneous mass officers, men and servants milled about. Dean, gripping his automatic, glimpsed a distorted white blur in the opaque gloom and fired pointblank. An angry snort, a diabolical scream, was the answer.

Then—silence.

The thing had, as suddenly as it came, disappeared.

The state of the negroes bordered on frenzy. Ignorant, superstitious, but a step above the beasts of the field, they were thrown into the wildest tumult.

Conjectures were rife. Even among the officers an uncanny atmosphere was apparent.

Dean sat, head bent, ear turned toward the desert. Sometimes his lips moved. Once the doctor, pausing near, caught the word "pals", and, with a troubled look in his eyes, moved on.

At dawn the march was again taken up. With water jugs filled and stomachs cheered by food, both men and officers were prepared to belittle the occurrence of the previous night.

That day the men, hot, dusty and sweat-caked, drove their mounts to the limit of endurance. Night found them camped in a depression between two sand dunes.

Dean and the officers sat apart, smoking. Borne upon the night wind came the yapping of a pack of jackals. The captain spoke: "Listen! Did you ever hear anything like that? The whole pack seems to be chasing their prey."

"And they don't, as a rule, do that," remarked the lieutenant. "They must be ravenous to attack a living creature. They feast, mostly, on carrion."

The captain knocked the ashes from his pipe. "Let's turn in—perhaps tonight will bring us better rest than last."

The camels, in a wide circle, lay on the sand, peacefully chewing their cuds, giving forth contented little grunts, happy, perhaps, to be freed of the cumbersome howdahs, to rest after their grilling trek.

A YELLOW gleam flecked the eastern sky. Dean, again waking suddenly, looked at the illuminated dial of his watch. It was 3 o'clock. For six hours he had slept.

Cautiously he arose. The waning moon peeped over the rim of the desert and the stars twinkled brightly in the cloudless sky. The scene, though desolate, held a certain rugged grandeur, and though Dean had never been a religious man, he now stood with bared head and silently admitted the greatness of the Creator.

While he stood, head bent, eyes dark with the mystery of the thing called life, he heard again the faint yap-yapping of the jackal pack. Rapidly the sound grew louder until a confusion of snarls, barks and growls came across the sand.

Walking to the top of one of the dunes, he looked out over the plain. The moon had risen swiftly and now flooded the vast expanse with its penetrating white light. As the American looked, his heart seemed to stand still. A rushing sound, as of many waters, filled his ears. A blindness shut out the moonlight, the desert, the jackal pack and the hideous thing, insane with fright and the fear which drove it on. Headlong he pitched forward on the sand.

A yell of mortal agony jerked the entire camp awake. Again the hideous sound of the night before, half scream, half squeal, shot terror to each heart. Again the rapid thud-thud of hoofs on sand sent the men into a panic of dread.

The thing was again rampaging about the camp.

The captain came staggering over the sand, his face drawn, his eyes bulging. In his left hand he supported his mutilated right arm, from which the flesh had been stripped. As he neared the center of the camp the thing came thundering up, squealing, lips drawn back from its hideous teeth, from which still dangled the quivering blood-dripping flesh of the officer's arm.

The men, sleep-dazed, stood paralyzed by fear. The gap between the captain and the creature grew mo-

mentarily less. The thing, screaming, lunged forward.

"Drop!" yelled the doctor.

Only sensing an order the captain obeyed and the flying hoofs merely grazed him as the creature, carried by its own momentum, ran far down the sand.

Turning, the thing charged again, but the doctor had, in the minute's grace, dragged the officer into the tent.

Robbed of its prey, the thing turned and ran into the herd of frightened camels. Kicking, pawing, biting and screaming, it stampeded the bunch and, like a demon possessed, drove them out over the plain.

The sun rose, that day, on a company of abjectly disheartened men. Danger that they could see and understand was of small moment to them; but this intangible menace sapped their blood.

"Something must be done," declared the lieutenant. "The captain is seriously injured. Three blacks were trampled to death, a half dozen badly hurt. Those that escaped are so demoralized that it is impossible to do anything with them. I had a time getting them to go out in the broad open light of the day and round up the camels. They won't go on. All they do is grovel on the sand and chant hideous prayers to their gods. The creature, whatever it is, is, in their opinion, a devil. Or, if not actually a devil, the steed of one.

"One of the black apes even goes so far as to say he *saw* the devil astride it.

"Of course, one has to make allowances for the ignoramuses. But one thing is a dead shot. Unless we can get that thing we are going to find ourselves short of servants. The only reason they stay now is because they are too scared to start back alone.

"And," continued the lieutenant, "not the least of my worries is Dean. You know how one of the men found him out on top of that sand dune, to all appearances dead—how he came around after a while, and all that."

The young officer paused, then resumed: "Have you seen him lately?"

The doctor shook his head. Lieutenant Hemmingway shuddered.

"It's awful. He just sits around and laces and unlaces his fingers and talks about 'pals.' I'll swear, the whole thing is getting on my nerves."

It was the day following the latest depredation of the thing. Hemmingway and the doctor were in close conversation. The captain, his arm carefully dressed, was, under a sedative, sleeping.

The doctor spoke quietly.

"We must get the thing. We will have to remain here until the captain is able to go on. I think in—"

He paused, pointed to the east.

"My God!" cried the lieutenant. "It's coming back!"

Dean sauntered in. In his blue eyes there was an expectant look. About the corners of his once quizzical mouth lurked a stern resolve, and his long, slim fingers were lacing, unlacing, weaving in and out.

"A pal never questions," he said softly. "He just goes on blindly trusting."

He looked out and his eye caught the huge white bulk of the creature tearing toward them across the sand.

"He called me pal," he crooned softly, "and I know what a pal's duty is. A pal never questions. He—"

Dean broke off.

"Keep your nerve, Lefty," he said easily. "I'm going to get it—this time. Hunt can't go on that way forever."

He picked up a rifle, and with a smile lurking about the corners of his lips, stood waiting.

Up to the camp came the creature. And as it came it sent its insane challenge before it.

Dean sighted and pulled the trigger of the rifle. A look of boyish pride crept over his face as he saw the creature stop, half turn, drop to its knees and roll over.

"It's a peculiar looking beast," said the lieutenant. "What do you make of it?"

He and the doctor walked across the sand toward the dead animal.

"It's a white camel," said the doctor, as Dean sped past them, canteen in hand.

When within thirty yards of the camel they quickened their pace and broke into a run. Dean was on the opposite side of the camel, and from his actions they sensed he was laboring under great mental strain.

"He won't drink," said the American, looking tearfully at the approaching men. "Last night I thought sure the wolf pack would get him—but the camel outran them. And now, when I've got him all safe and sound, he won't even speak."

Then, straightening, "It's all right, though, because a pal never questions. He just goes on blindly trusting."

Horror crept over the faces of the soldiers gathered thickly about the dead camel.

Strapped securely to the back of the animal were Hunt and the Arab girl, Shahrazad—nude, eyes staring, blackened tongues protruding, hands securely tied behind their backs, propped perfectly upright, but dead and mummified by the action of the wind and sun through which the insane camel had borne them for months.

"My God!" cried the doctor. "What a revenge!"

He turned and laid a kindly hand on Dean's arm. "Come on, old man," he said gently. "We'll take care of Hunt."

Like a child the big American turned.

"All right," he said, "but don't forget I'm his pal."

He trudged along at the doctor's side, mumbling, as he henceforth and forever would, "A pal never questions. He just goes on blindly trusting."

AWAY to the east, in the desert of Nefud, beside the well of Abul-Ala, lies hidden a giant meteorite, and the Arabs who still worship it call it the Burning Wrath of Allah.

A Different Story, Off the Beaten Path, Is This Tale of a Match That Fulfilled Its Destiny

The Thin Match

By HENRY S. WHITEHEAD

Author of "Sea Change," "The Fireplace," etc.

SHE began her life as a match along with several hundred million near relatives of the great family of pitch-pine, in the factory of the Emerald Match Company, of Scranton, New Jersey.

She had not realized her inferiority until she was shut up tightly in the close quarters of what was to be for a long time her home. Fate placed her in that particular kind of box which was labeled as a "Product of Finland, Average Contents Sixty Sticks." There was also other printed information on the box-label, couched in some Scandinavian language for anyone who might be able to read it.

Life in a family, even one averaging sixty members, is a decidedly different matter from being one item in a phalanx, a horde, of hundreds of millions, all exactly alike. Just here was where the thin match's troubles began. She was different. In her case it was not a mere slip of the machine. It was natural depravity. She had grown a trifle too close to the bark in the original tree. Along one of her slim sides there was a brown streak, which set her off from the others like a touch of the tar brush. Then, she was thin—altogether too thin for a respectable match. Exact conformity to type is expected among matches. Her inconsiderable cubic area was rather less than half what it should have been, and besides all this, her head had a decided, an unmistakable, hitch to one side.

Her box, along with fourteen gross of precisely similar boxes, was shipped to a Nashville jobber, and she learned next to nothing of this world's experiences until her box, with twenty-three others, was placed one sunny morning in a cent-in-the-slot machine on a cigar counter in Chattanooga.

Here she got her first intimation that she was different. It was very close quarters—would be, of course, until the box found a purchaser and her box-mates began to go out one by one to fulfil their destiny. She began to receive cool jostles, cold shoulders, from the other matches, her particular near neighbors. Here, too, she had some experience of coal smoke; rather premature, but inevitable in Chattanooga.

One memorable day there came the familiar snick of an inserted cent and the rasp of the lever, and her box dropped out and went into the pocket of a young man who had bought it to light cigarettes. There was wild excitement and no little speculation among the matches. They were like troops on the very verge of an action. The young man gave them plenty of action. He used the first thirteen matches very quickly, which made a good deal more room in the box, and then there was a long undisturbed period while the box remained in the

pocket of an old vest which hung on a hook in the closet of the young man's boarding-house bedroom. One day, the young man having moved away and carelessly left the old vest behind him, the box was taken out by the boarding-house keeper's husband, a mild-mannered gentleman who smoked a pipe outdoors, and he used nine more of the matches.

Between the unconscious selection of the normal matches by the owners of the box and the jostling which the thin match had received from the others, she found herself tucked away into a narrow corner where the thin wood of the box-bottom was edged by the still thinner paper pasted outside.

One day a companion of the boarding-house woman's husband asked him for a light, and, forgetting to return the box, this man became its new owner. He used only one match, though, and then left the box on top of one of his front gate-posts, where he had been talking to a neighbor, and little Sallie Eaton saw it there and picked it off on her way home from school. Sallie tucked it away in the pocket of her apron, where her mother found it when the apron was going to the wash, and Lance Eaton, Sallie's brother, found it on the sewing machine where his mother had laid it, and annexed it for himself.

THERE were thirty-seven matches in the box when Lance found it. There may have been some slight variation in the "average contents" when the box left the Emerald Match Company. It is certain that when Lance handed it through the car window in the railroad station to Big Pete Jenkins, there were only nine left and among these, quite tightly wedged by now into her corner, and out of sight, was the thin match.

The other eight were dead-set against her by now. They had no further contact with her; she was ostracized, a pariah of a match—too thin, and too brown on one side, and with a head too little symmetrical and too little apt to light at the first draw along the box-side for any self-respecting match to notice her at all!

Pete Jenkins went all the way to New York. By the time he arrived there were four of the nine left. The thin match was still in her corner, wedged in. It was better for her there, on the whole, she had come to believe. The pressure of the feeling against her had sent up strongly into her head the idea of her destiny. This was, of course, only the common destiny of all matches—to set something on fire. It might be anything, from a joss-stick to a great conflagration; but it was to start fire. That, she knew by instinct, was the great thing. What difference did it really make, she said over and over again to herself, that she was thin, had a crooked head, and a streak all down one side! There lay within her power the possibility of anything—anything, that is, that could come of setting something on fire. Patience! When it came her turn, if it ever did come, to be taken out and scraped along the side of the box, she must light, and blaze up, and burn clearly and steadily. She must not fail. And it would be so easy to fail! Many a match had failed, and for many reasons. There was the possibility of dampness, that greatest of all match-dreads. Then, the outside of the box would be sadly worn down by now, with most of the matches gone. The first out, those nearest to the top as fate at the hands of the packer adjusted it for them, always had the best chance. Then, too, she might break! She would be especially likely to break, being so very thin; or her paraffin-soaked neck, which was the thinnest part of her, might have got too dry to burn properly!

But there was no way to regulate these chances. A match could only wait and hope, and the thin match waited and hoped with a good courage, resolved to light quickly and burn as clearly and steadily as she possibly could, if ever her chance should come.

Pete, it seemed, had no particular use for the remaining matches in this box. He had, in fact, quite forgotten them. For the box, very weak and wobbly now, had been packed inside the pocket of a jacket which Pete had replaced with a sweater a day out from New York and placed inside a gripsack. Pete was on board a ship now, a ship bound to Labrador, and he was using old-fashioned sulfur matches to light his pipe against the wind up on deck.

It occurred to the thin match that she might never get her chance, even though the box should be resurrected, because she was quite out of sight. Even if someone opened the box again, she was wedged in so tightly that she might not even be seen. Well, there was no use in borrowing trouble! She knew she could not regulate the universe. She could only wait, and so she waited, and waited. . .

It was more than four months before the crushed and battered old box, so worn and greasy now that the printing on the cover could hardly have been read by even the most learned Scandinavian, was brought to light again in Pete's cabin on the upper reaches of the Nasquapee.

It was a desperate day of still cold. The thermometer had sunk and sunk for the past several weeks. It was too cold now for any more snow to fall, but Pete was snowed in.

That sound behind him was the scratching of a lynx's claws, a lynx which had dug down through the snow to the lean-to, braced in with river-bottom rocks—great, flat rocks, outside the hut—the lean-to where Pete kept his spare provisions against this commonest of sub-Arctic setbacks: being snowed in. Pete had plenty of provisions, both inside the hut and out there in the handy lean-to, covered in. The lynx had besieged him now for two days and nights.

He had plenty of food, and he might have shot the lynx at any time. But he dared not shoot the lynx. He dared not shoot the lynx because he had one cartridge left, and one only. The great ravenous animal, with the deadly hunger-courage of the far North, had utterly put aside all his natural fear of Man. Pete could thrust his rifle against the satiny black fur which showed through the chinks of the hut and blow it to pieces at any time.

But he dared not. He dared not because he had no matches. By a stroke of the wildest ill-fortune he had destroyed a full box, the last box in his store, by omitting to close it before striking one on its side. He had struck it toward the end where the heads were, and they had flared up and burned off to cinders in precisely two seconds. He was relying on that cartridge, that last cartridge, to light the fire. He would have to light it soon. There had not been a live ember since early yesterday morning when the snow that had accumulated above his stone chimney, far above at the outlet, had come pouring down and doused his fire.

He could not kill the lynx and light the fire too. He must choose. And now, crouched on the floor before the cold embers, his back to the lynx, which scratched and scratched, the man, bundled like a great ball in his parka and seal leggings and with his heavy furs about his chilled body, was dully trying to decide what to do.

It was death either way, it seemed. He could only choose between the bloody, riving death at the lynx's claws, or the slower but perhaps no

less deadly alternative of being frozen stiff.

Suddenly, he thought of that old coat! There might—there just *might* be, in one of the pockets, a stray match. He had worn it, he remembered, on the train trip and for the first day on board the ship, and had carried matches in the side pockets. First pounding his hands together to start up some little circulation, he dug, with his great fur gloves still on his hands, under his bunk against the end wall. Out came the old coat at last. He hadn't worn it for months now. Laying it out roughly before him on the edge of the bunk, and again slapping his gloved hands together, he hastily pulled off the right glove with his teeth. Then he thrust into the pockets, first the right one, then the left. What was this? He clawed out the crumbling remains of the old box. Matches? He shook the box close to his ear. Matches! God! —matches!

He spilled them on the bunk in his agitation and relief, which shook him from head to foot with a violent trembling. He wept uncontrollably and started to pick them up carefully. There were three, all good, sound matches.

He slapped his hands together again, pulled off his other glove, and rubbed his hands briskly up and down on the heavy fur of his parka. Then he took his rifle, and laid it, ready loaded, beside him on the bunk.

The scratching of the lynx seemed to him louder and bolder; more imminent and menacing. The great beast, it would seem, could not dislodge the heavy, flat stones with which the cache was overlaid. There was not room enough for that—too little purchase to be obtained. He looked around. The lynx had abandoned its old purpose, and was coming through into the hut. It was working on the wood now. That was what had made the change in the sound of the scratching. Already a huge, wicked paw appeared, a paw armed with chisels! The lynx snuffled. If not pemmican, then Man!

CAREFULLY, gingerly, Pete drew the first match along the side of the box. But the oily side caused it to slip without igniting. At the second trial the head crumbled off the stick. He threw away the useless stick and took the second. It broke off, close to the head. He fumbled after the head on the floor, his hands like lumps of lead. At last he got it between his thumb and the side of the box. It would burn him, he knew; but what was a burn? He rubbed it against the box. It flared suddenly, died at once, giving him a vicious burn in the process, and smoked out to a tiny, inconsiderable cinder.

Pete turned pale under the dirt of his unshaven cheeks, and reached for his last match. He struck it, with infinite care, seven times, drawing it along different portions of the better preserved box-side. It fizzled at last, but that was all. The head crumbled off as the first had done.

Pete sat there looking at the fragments of the broken box and the useless sticks in a dumb frenzy of despair. He was done—at the end of his rope. Then, suddenly animated, he seized the useless wreck of the empty box and threw it on the hard earthen floor, and ground it with his heel. He sat and stared at it. The lynx broke off a great splinter of wood, but Pete did not notice the lynx. What was that? It looked like a good match-head, there under the edge of the flimsy match box now ground and crushed flat.

Almost perishing now with the bitter cold in his ungloved hands, which made them feel like useless lumps of lead, Pete groped for it. He got it at last in his numb fingers, and carefully gathered up a bit of the box-side, a mere splinter. He carried the find

over to the fireplace where he had his fire ready laid and looked closely at what he had picked up in the failing light. It was the thin match, intact. Pete's grinding, angry heel had only rolled her about in the dirt. Her body was wrenched—her poor, pitiful little body, thin and crooked—but there had been something of stiffness in that disfiguring brown streak which she had inherited from being too near the bark.

The thin match summoned up all her resolution. The time had come for her to fulfil her destiny. . . .

Against his broken, begrimed fragment of the box-side, Pete scraped the crazy, splintered, wobbly, thin match. A bright, steady little flame sprang up at him. Not breathing, his aching hands laboriously cupped, he reached for the under side of the fire.

The thin match slipped from between his numbed fingers and fell, but she landed just within the fireplace. Exactly above her hung a fragment of oily pine bark. With her last expiring fragment of will, the thin match, now two-thirds burned away, squeezed a thin trickle of yellow flame up until it touched the very tip of the fringed edge of that piece of pine bark. There was a fearful instant of suspense; then—then—a thin and growing little blaze began to run up the bark-splinter's edge; the fire caught and roared up the stone chimney. Pete wept, crouching there benumbed, his great body in the ungainly furs sagging down almost against the blaze under the stress of this reaction.

A RIPPING slither of tearing wood came from the other side of the hut. Pete turned his head dully. The lynx had thrust an entire foreleg through into the hut; the great head with its staring, inhuman yellow eyes was pushing through. Peter saw the foamy slaver drip from the snarling mouth.

Every joint protesting, aching in all his bones, Pete reached across to the bunk for the rifle. His jaw set, and he dragged himself to his feet. He took four steps across the hut, and thrust the muzzle of the rifle against the lynx's forehead between the great, staring eyes. A shattering roar shook the solid hut, and, dropping his rifle, Pete staggered back to the life-giving blaze.

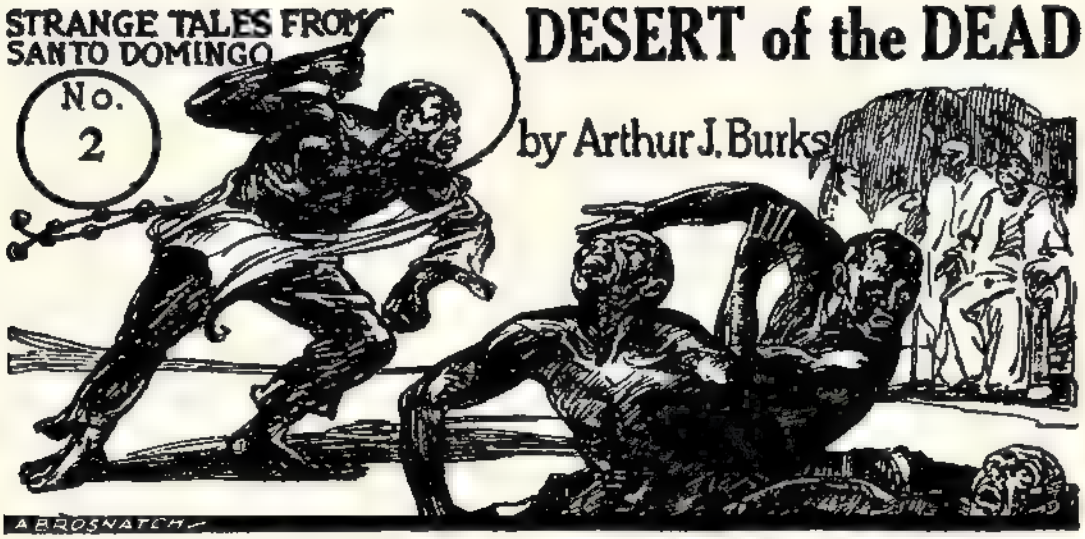
In WEIRD TALES for April

BLOODY MOON

By HARRY HARRISON KROLL

A Weird Tale of the Kentucky Caves

ON SALE AT ALL NEWS STANDS MARCH FIRST



DESERT of the DEAD

by Arthur J. Burks

Author of "Thus Spake the Prophetess," "Luisma's Return," etc.

IN SANTO DOMINGO any native will tell you, at great length, tales of the glories of dead and gone Dominican heroes. They will tell you of the bloody sack of Puerto Plato; of how a defeated general fled to Porto Rico without telling his army in the north that his cause had been lost, leaving them to fight on with the loss of a thousand souls when there was really no need of fighting; of how another general captured Macoris without firing a shot, of how, compelling his fighters to strip to their naked hides, he caused each man to be smeared with oil and armed with two machetes. They went into Macoris after nightfall, slipping through the streets like ghosts. Encountering another person in the pitch darkness, the fighter knew at once whether that person were friend or foe—if he felt a body greasy like unto his own, he moved on with a grunt of recognition, but if he encountered the feel of cloth his machete struck swiftly, viciously, and in silence, except for the crunch of bones.

All these stories, and many others, will the natives tell you; but if you ask them how the Desert of the Dead acquired its name they will cross themselves hurriedly and flee from you as if from a living plague. The more ignorant ones will make signs behind your back and scratch crosses in the dusty prints where your feet have trodden. You have asked a question that no one will answer, for the subject is taboo.

But, from a few words I had heard here and there among the better educated Dominicans, I pieced together a tale of how the place had come to be so named—a tale of a struggle in which brother met brother, father met son, paternal uncles crossed machetes with fuzzy-chinned nephews, and of how all met their deaths together in a baptism of fire.

THE Desert of the Dead lies in the very heart of the Cordillera Central. It is a great hollow bowl, cliff-bordered, far back in the mountains westward from Basimo. This much I know, and the scraps of stories which I had heard had filled me with curiosity that would not be gainsaid. I resolved to visit this desert of grisly name. I sought far and wide for guides to lead the way. None could be found with the courage to accompany me.

So I took passage on a *guagua* which plied between Santo Domingo

City and Santiago, and asked to be dropped off at Madrigal. Here I shifted my light pack to a comfortable position athwart my shoulders and headed into the west, toward the spot where natives have made a ford across the Jaina River. There were many natives with me on the trail, and of some of these I asked where the trail branched off to the Desert of the Dead. Again the natives crossed themselves—and made marks in the prints my shoes had left.

"Go not into the desert of *Los Muertos!*" cried one man when I put the question. "As *alcade* of Madrigal it is my duty to warn you that those who enter that aged trail never return again to the sight of mortal men! I warn you as a friend—and because it is my duty."

I thanked him and, for some reason which even I could not fathom, I studied his face so that I should remember him if ever we met again. There was no reason why I should have done this. Natives do not interest me in the slightest. But I did it. I looked back a few moments later, intending to wave him a friendly *adios*. He was stooping to the tracks I had made, and was making crosses in the heel prints with his grimy fingers! I did not wave. But I watched the natives who were going in the same direction as I.

Four hours out of Madrigal, near El Jamey, I saw an opening in the jungle which had at one time been the beginning of a trail. It was choked with brambles and tropical vines. It led straight toward the mountains which raised their serrated edges against the western horizon. I wondered if this were the trail. I watched the natives. One and all, old and young, they passed the smothered opening with averted heads, and with their right hands they made the sign of the cross athwart their bodies. Then I knew that this, indeed, was the beginning of the trail.

I drew a machete I had purchased and cut my way into the opening. I made considerable noise at first, and some of the natives cast frightened eyes at me. Then they fled along the main trail in either direction. I smiled to myself with the cynic's amusement.

But after an hour or two of fighting the jungle growth, the way became easier and I sheathed my machete. There was no mark to indicate that anyone had passed this way in years. Yet the trail was there, and at the other end of it, what? The sun was touching the serrated crest of the Cordilleras to the westward when I asked myself that question. I was tired and almost famished. I stopped where a trickle of water crept forth from beneath a jumble of boulders and made my camp for the first night.

THE sun was almost in the same place next evening when I came to the end of the trail, right against where a passageway through a stone wall had been filled in by a great explosion, which had blown in the opposing sides of the wall. There was a trickle of water here and I cooked my supper before exploring farther. Then I lifted my bedding roll to my shoulders once more and started to climb up the face of the cliff, intending to skirt the old cave-in. Twenty minutes later I stood on the summit and gazed, stricken with wonder, directly down upon the Desert of the Dead. It wasn't particularly gruesome and I laughed anew as I recalled the actions of natives whom I had questioned about the place.

It was a giant amphitheater surrounded by sheer walls of stone, upon the sides of which not even a Dominican goat might have found footing. The floor was desert, desolate, bare of even a blade of grass.

I looked back at the spot where I had eaten my supper. It would be a good place in which to spend the

night. But the sun had crept behind the mountain's crest now, and the place below me was filled with a shadow that was vaguely disquieting. I shuddered, for what reason I know not, and made my bed on the high rock where I stood. It was too late to attempt descent into the Desert of the Dead. I fell asleep at once. My nerves were as tranquil as those of a babe in arms.

I awoke with a start and looked at my watch by moonlight. It was exactly midnight. Then I looked down into the Desert of the Dead. Only now it was not a desert! Where I had seen sand before there was now the luxuriant green of tropical verdure! Huge palm trees nestled at the base of the cliff at my feet. I started —and almost fell into the rock-bordered passageway which led from the outside world into the Desert of the Dead! There had been no explosion and no cave-in! I rubbed my eyes. I pinched myself to see if I were dreaming—and the pinching hurt!

Then I heard the sound of voices from the heart of the desert floor—voices which chattered excitedly in the patois of Santo Domingo. There were words of command, shouts of men on sentry-go, sharp shouts of the Officer of the Day upon his round of the sentries. The Desert of the Dead was the rendezvous of a huge detachment of Dominican soldiers! I could see the lights of their campfires as they twinkled through the foliage like giant fireflies.

The sudden displacing of a pebble behind me. I looked quickly around. A black man was creeping stealthily up the very path I had ascended to reach my sleeping place. He paused for a long moment after that pebble had fallen. He listened. Reading his mind I looked toward that encampment below me to see if anyone had heard. No one had. The black man continued his toilsome ascent. In much less time than I had required for the climb, he reached the summit and straightened himself slowly. I saw on the ragged shoulders of his blue denim blouse the gaudy epaulets of a revolutionary general. He carried a round black can in his arms. He handled it as carefully as if it had been a sleeping child.

He placed the can in a hole above the wall and attached a fuse to its top. Instantly I saw his intention. He meant to blast the passageway and lock the detachment inside a living tomb! I tried to move and could not raise a finger. I shouted a warning, and no sound came from my lips. I felt the marrow in my bones congeal slowly to ice.

The general turned and retraced his steps, as silently as he had come. I watched him go. I saw him come to pause in a spot where the woods and the trail by which I had come were lined with motionless figures. He raised his hand in a commanding gesture and a whole company of shadows formed in single file and began the entry to the Desert of the Dead. Their footfalls made not a sound. The figures stooped slightly, as if to avoid detection. Once more I tried to shout a warning and no words came.

I counted the men as they filed through. Three hundred silent shadows!

The general mounted once more to the rock upon which I sat. I watched him more closely and gasped—for he cast no shadow and I could see the opposing walls of the passageway directly through him! I might not have been there at all for all the attention he paid me. When every last shadow had gained the Desert of the Dead the general touched match to the fuse. In a shrill and frenzied shout he cried out one word in bastard Spanish.

"Charge!"

The order rang out across the amphitheater and echoed back and forth between the rocky walls. The sentries

shouted to one another, and their voices were shrill with fear. The encampment below was in an uproar. There was a great explosion and half the wall fell into the passageway!

"Fight, you soldiers without shame," cried the general, "for there is no retreat!"

As he danced up and down upon the rock I knew that I gazed upon the figure of a man beside himself, a man who had gone crazy with the lust to kill.

SUDDENLY a red glare lighted the scene. Some frenzied fool had fired the woods inside the amphitheater! Great columns of flame leapt up above the crests of the cliffs. The fire spread with the speed of the wind. No one seemed to notice the danger at first, for the two opposing forces were at handgrips below me, fighting with tooth and nail, with rifles and machetes, to the very death. Shrieks of the dying smote my ears, hoarse shouts of men filled with the lust for blood. The tide of battle surged in my direction. I saw the top of one man's head leap into the air as a 50-70 bullet made a direct hit. I saw another man get hit in the leg, and the shot fractured the bone until it protruded through his ragged trousers. Yet he hopped on his right leg, with the broken one swinging grotesquely and getting in his way, straight toward the man who had shot him. He came to close quarters and decapitated his enemy with one stroke of his machete. The falling man's rifle discharged as he fell and I saw the killer double up with a bullet in his stomach. He rolled over on his back, and the head of the man he had killed rolled up against that of the killer, both faces in plain view of where I sat. I gasped in horror. These two were brothers! The family likeness was unmistakable!

For fifteen minutes the battle eddied and swirled at my feet. The general who had planned the bloody coup danced up and down in frenzy on the rock beside me. He even jumped upon me and all I felt was a cool breeze against my cheek! The fire grew by leaps and bounds. Then the blood-hungry fighters saw and knew their danger.

"*Fuego! Fuego!*" came the cries from all sides.

The opposing forces forgot their enmity in the common danger. As one man they looked toward the passageway and saw that it was hopeless. The walls were practically out of the question, even had there been time. Friend and enemy huddled together, a blood-stained group in the center of the Desert of the Dead.

The fire was upon them.

Four men leapt to their feet and hurried away toward the western wall. I watched them begin the ascent. Watched breathlessly as four ragged figures fought their way upward. Three of them gained the summit and fled into the mountains, crazed with pain and terror, beating the fire from their garments as they ran—straight into the west, where there was no hope of rescue at all. They had only prolonged their doom. The flames caught the fourth man halfway up the cliff. A hungry tongue of fire seized his garments and enveloped him. He shrieked in terrible agony. His feet lost their footing, but his hands clung with the strength of despair. He died there, with his last shrieks ringing in my ears long after they had ceased. The human torch grew dim at last and died out. But the fingers still clung, holding that charred *thing* suspended against the face of the cliff.

Up to my nostrils came the odor of burning flesh—smarting, stinging, horrible. Shrieks, moans, prayers.

"*Ai Dios mio! Padre de nosotros! Imagen de los Santos! Virgen de Altagracia!*"

One by one the cries were stopped as the fire swept across the Desert of the Dead. The general, who had been watching it all from the rock beside me, walked to the edge and looked down. Then he leapt straight out, praying as he fell! The fire reached up hungry fingers to clutch at him and his figure vanished in the flames.

Still lost in this avalanche of horror I turned my gaze back to that charred figure, burned beyond human resemblance, which clung to the opposite wall. It oscillated gently in the currents of air generated by the heat of the fire—that heat I could not feel. The oscillation loosened the grip of those dead fingers and the sodden figure fell back into the huge inferno, flinging high a shower of sparks as it struck with a thud that came plainly across to me.

I was all alone above the Desert of the Dead!

Morning came and I did not realize it until I felt the heat of the sun upon my uncovered body where I sat upon that rock. Had I dreamed it all? No! For up to my nostrils from the desolated Desert of the Dead came the unmistakable odor of burned flesh! But the desert was just as I had seen it before lying down to my sleep the night before. The morning breezes carried that elusive odor, which I shall never forget, up and out of the amphitheater, and bore it away to some unknown valley of winds, back in the heart of the Cordilleras.

Two days later, dazed, broken, burning up with fever and weird imaginings, I once more entered the main trail near El Jamey. I was met there by the *alcalde* of Madrigal. He hurried toward me with gladness shining in his eyes.

"Ah, my friend," he said, "I thank God that you have returned safely from that place of horrors, the Desert of the Dead!"

I looked dully, vacantly, into his kindly eyes. Something he read in mine caused him to retreat a step or two. Then he turned and fled!

For with his mention of that name, scarcely realizing what I did, I stooped down and made the sign of the cross in the marks left by his bare feet!

The Third story in this remarkable series of "Strange Tales from Santo Domingo" by Lieutenant Arthur J. Burks will be printed in WEIRD TALES next month. It is called "Daylight Shadows." Later Stories in the same series will narrate the weird exploits of the notorious Dominican bandit, Jose Espinosa

Fate Playea a Strange Prank Upon This Man Who Slew Himself

The Last Cigarette

By GREYE LA SPINA

Author of "The Tortoise-Shell Cat," "The Remorse of Professor Panebianco," etc.

MILTON WHEELER'S thick-set body shivered as he put a match to the wick of the oil heater, noting mechanically that the reservoir was almost empty. Before he could get more oil, he would have to settle that already large bill owing the grocer.

He paced the floor to stir his torpid circulation, rubbing his stubby hands together briskly.

His gray suit was much too light for November, and his undergarments —repeatedly darned and patched by Agnes' hands—too thin to yield their original warmth. He owed the tailor for that new black overcoat; as for the underwear, he would first have to pay for last summer's things and for the new black hat, before ordering other garments. A black suit he had not quite dared to order. Not that the tailor had actually asked for money, but he had observed casually that he wouldn't send in his little bill until after the funeral.

After the funeral! Milton shivered again, this time not with cold. Everything was coming in—after the funeral.

He felt that Agnes had dealt him almost a personal blow by dying; without her co-operation, how could he keep up his pretenses? It would be a few days only, before his hated rival would learn upon how small a foundation had been built Milton's house of sham. That Benson, who had in everything but the winning of Agnes triumphed over him, should learn of his failure to make a success financially, was to Milton a frightful tragedy.

Milton had had a few thousand dollars in bank, and a fair salary at the laboratory, when he married Agnes, winning her from Benson, who had large private means. (It was the first time since they two had been boys in school together that Milton had triumphed over the other man.) It had been indescribably galling to him to think that Benson would ever learn how much Agnes had lost in marrying a poorer man. Agnes had rebelled at this deception in the beginning; she did not care, she said. But then she saw how keenly Milton felt about it—how his every thought was turned in the one direction. Poor girl! Her first unkind act had been her desertion of him at this critical moment.

Milton had managed to fool everybody. He had kept up a lavish establishment, spending his principal freely. He had bought Agnes everything that could make the impression of unlimited means upon the rejected Benson, whose keen eyes he fancied were always upon him. Agnes' death, however, found him penniless; without a position; confronting a mountain of unpaid bills. Rent, unsettled for four months; groceries, the sum was almost staggering; butcher, how could they have consumed such quantities of meat?

The doctor—somehow this account had mounted up to much more than Milton had anticipated. There must have been many visits to the office of which Agnes' husband was ignorant; she must have kept her sickness from him a much longer time than he had realized. To the doctor's statement Milton had pinned, with sardonic humor, bills from the druggist, the florist, the undertaker.

Then there were coal bills; laundry bills; ice bills. The sum of those items marshaled itself before him with malignant triumph, conveying to his shrinking spirit the overwhelming prevision of defeat.

Men were being turned away everywhere. He might be months finding another such position as he had been holding for four years. He might raise money to settle that appalling total of debt by paying the exorbitant interest rate of some loan shark, but even this would be only a temporary relief. Discovery of his castle of pretense was inevitable, and to him disclosure of the real facts meant such complete, such utter ruin, that the bare idea bowed him down into the very dust of humiliation. He could see Benson's smile. . . .

THERE was only one way out. Death! It was distasteful to him, because his death under present circumstances would mean the disclosure of what he had for three years been struggling to conceal. His death, with the revelation of that appalling sum total of debt, would make him the subject of derision for his rival.

If there were only some way to escape without baring his sordid secret to the world! He whipped his dulled mind into unwilling concentration. And then—suddenly—he had it! Within the dusk the little heater cast a circle of friendly radiance. Milton threw a glance upward. . . The lamp hook in that great beam across the middle of the ceiling looked strong enough. In the laundry there was always plenty of good rope. He would bring up a stepladder. . . .

Half an hour later he jimmied open from the outside one of the study windows giving on the garden; the gusty November air swirled into the room, setting the curtains a-flutter. Upon the floor under his writing desk he laid a ten-dollar bill as if it had been accidentally dropped by hurried fingers. The balance of his last week's salary he tore carefully into small pieces and burned, scattering the ashes on the night wind from the open window. He pulled out both desk drawers, tossing their contents upon table and floor as if some unlicensed intruder had gone through them hastily.

Upon the bronze tray on his desk he laid a sheet of paper, inscribed with a few terse, carefully thought out words. He had disposed of all his securities, he wrote, to charities in which he and his wife had been interested, but had left sufficient cash in the desk drawer to settle all outstanding accounts against his estate. He chuckled as he wrote, a humorless sound, and then, shrugging his thick shoulders, finished: "I cannot live without Agnes. I am going to join her."

In those last moments he was capping the edifice of sham with the most marvelous of cupolas; he was putting the finishing touch to a work which for three years had been the driving force of his life. From boyhood he had had the worst of it with Benson, always; now Benson would be unable to smile in that slow, exasperating way of his. No, Benson would be obliged to think of him with astonished admiration.

He felt malicious enjoyment as he surveyed the indications of burglary, and the note that so well covered the traces of his supposed wealth. The fools would believe he had killed himself out of grief at the loss of his wife;

they would continue to admire and envy him—and his secret would remain undiscovered.

EVERYTHING was ready. He lighted a cigarette contentedly. When he had finished this last smoke, he would climb the ladder, adjust the rope. . . . It would be the greatest triumph of his life, after all—this death. His only regret was that he could not be there to enjoy the effect of the stupendous climax.

His cigarette finished, he flung the butt away and mounted the ladder. He felt gingerly of the rope knotted about his neck, shuddering involuntarily. If it were not that by dying he was making his secret secure for all time—. After all, it was the only way.

Setting his teeth, he pushed against the ladder with both feet. It toppled to the floor with a crash.

As his body was whirled about by the tautening rope, a flare from the bronze tray on the desk caught Milton's eye.

In that last poignant moment he had the mortification of observing that the cigarette butt had fallen upon and ignited the suicide note, that curled—crisped—blackened to an indecipherable ash before his agonized eyes.

INVADERS FROM THE DARK

A Remarkable Serial Novel

By GREYE LA SPINA

This tale of werewolves and the powers of evil, set in a simple American village, rises in a gradual crescendo of interest and horror to a breathtaking denouement. The story begins in the April WEIRD TALES.

A Fascinating Story—A Powerful Tale

On Sale At All News Stands March First

The Tale of a Man Who Lost His Soul

The Weird Green Eyes of Sari

By MARGARET McBRIDE HOSS

SINCE man first reared himself upright on his two legs and looked at the stars, the sea and the things of the sea have worked strange enchantments upon that inward part of him he calls his soul. I have known many men whom the sea has regenerated. Like the broom of the Almighty, sweeping away rottenness and filth, the salt wind sometimes blows clean the secret places of the soul. On the other hand, I have known many men whom the sea has cursed. Back to the land that spawned them it tosses them with queer, tormenting kinks in their souls, kinks destined never to be ironed out by anything save the impartial hand of death. But only once have I known the sea, or a thing that crept out of the sea, to steal the soul from the body of a man.

In a modest coast town, tucked unobtrusively away in the southeast corner of the map, Philip Sanborne and I grew up together. Our green apples, our marbles, our dreams and our lickings all lacked savor unless we shared them one with the other. First as a kid and later as a man, I admired Phil inordinately. He was easily the best man I have ever known. Not the pious sort of good, you understand: never went near a church, proclaimed his faults and hid his virtues, and in particularly lurid moments made use of a vocabulary as picturesque and colorful as that of any pirate who ever scoured the seven seas. But he was innately clean and selfless and square; he couldn't have been any other way even had he tried.

He was beautifully built, broad shouldered, narrow hipped, with hair of that attractive, glinting blondness that shines like precious metal in the sun. In appearance he might have been one of the blue-eyed heroes of the old Norse sagas, a hardy sea rover worshiper of Odin and the great god Thor come down from Valhalla; but, as a matter of fact, Phil was indifferent to the sea. Always clever with his hands, he built a squat, friendly little house that he adored and puttered over endlessly. He lined it with books and framed it with flowers; he cluttered it with quaint outlandish furniture carved in his leisure moments; he saturated it with pipe smoke and peopled it with the dreams that come to a man when he is young and a little lonely. Most of these dreams bore the quiet gray eyes and thoughtful face of the one girl in whom Phil ever evinced more than a passing interest—Mary McKee.

My wife and I were more than ordinarily fond of Mary and we were genuinely distressed when the years slipped by with nothing definite coming of their friendship. The pitiful truth was that Mary cared more than Phil. Hers was the steady, unswerving love of a woman, whose heart once given cannot be recalled at will. I

think there were times when she tried desperately to call it back into her keeping, for the heart of Mary was a prize that was coveted by more men than one; but Phil's it was in the beginning and Phil's it stubbornly remained.

How or where Phil came under the spell of Sari Threnow's shoal-green eyes, I don't know. There was something terrible and at the same time infinitely pathetic about his passion for her; it worried and tore at him like a vindictive live creature determined to leave him neither mental peace nor surcease from bodily longing. She was lovely to look at, but there was an intangible something about her beauty that I hated. I never looked at her without crushing down an itching, maniacal desire to twist her long yellow hair about her pale throat and . . .

I am not naturally subject to homicidal seizures either, I assure you! At the time, I was heartily ashamed of that desire. Later, I cursed myself sick for throttling it.

Her mode of dress was so startling that it deserves mention. Always she was garbed in silvery, shimmering, exquisite stuffs, fashioned with an odd pointed effect trailing in back, and her only ornaments were strands of pearls that vied with her skin in whiteness. When she and Phil were together, the presence of others was seemingly regarded as a nuisance to be escaped as quickly and expeditiously as possible. When Phil was busy, she came often to see my wife, Nancy, and two vertical lines of worry etched between Nancy's eyes were the invariable sequels to her visits. Now Nancy has no kinship with the damp, lachrymose type of female who drips tears merely for the pleasure she derives thereby, and when I came home one evening and found her crying, the incident left me unpleasantly shaken.

"Don't mind me, Bob," she said, dabbing at her eyes and attempting a watery smile. "Sari Threnow just left. There is something about that woman that puzzles and frightens me. It isn't anything she says, because she never says anything at all—just sits and watches me. Oh, you can't imagine! My tiniest move never escapes her weird green eyes. She is absorbingly interested in the way I wash my dishes, sweep my house, comb my hair and darn your socks. She behaves like a visitor from another planet, who, ignorant of the ways of women, tries to learn by heart the things that women do. Oh, I know what I'm saying sounds ridiculous! And more ridiculous still is my creepy feeling of certainty that she wants something, wants it so terribly she would move heaven itself to gain it. It isn't love and it isn't money or any of the things a normal woman craves—it's something incredible—something she is working night and day to take away from Phil. It frightens me."

My bland demeanor was far from being a true index to my feelings, for I recalled with a shiver of disgust the emotions that a sight of Sari Threnow never failed to evoke in me.

"You're letting your imagination run away with you, dear," I soothed. "If she's after anything poor old Phil could give, he'd hand it over and be pathetically grateful to her for taking it.

"A material something, yes. But it isn't a question of that."

Nancy's quiet conviction silenced the protest that rose to my lips.

"Do you think she loves Phil?" I asked after an uneasy pause.

My wife made a surprizing answer.

"I think she tries, but she doesn't know how."

"Fiddlesticks!" I replied. "I'm going to see Phil tomorrow and tell him that her visits here must come to an end."

But I never did.

THAT very night Sari Threnow vanished as suddenly and mysteriously as she had appeared. I pictured her flitting like some exotic bird of passage to some fairer region; she wasn't a Mary McKee—one man couldn't hold her long. Mighty lucky for Phil, too, I mused. Of course he'd be hard hit for a while—but time is a marvelous healer of wounds.

I trailed over town searching for him. I wanted to drag him home to one of Nancy's hot, savory dinners. I wanted to keep him with me while I wrangled about the morals of the Patagonians, enlarged upon the utter inadequacy of charlotte russe as a dessert—anything to keep him from brooding over his ill-starred slavery to a woman's green eyes and white, white skin.

When the day passed and I found no trace of him, I was worried. When the second day dragged by, a replica of the first, I was frantic. When the third day ushered in a troop of crawling rumors, I was beside myself. Of course it was inevitable that a woman of Sari Threnow's personal appearance should be conspicuous. Phil's infatuation for her, too, was public property. The thing that damned Phil was this: her silvery clothes and her priceless pearls, left intact, offered to the village mute testimony that her going had been neither regular nor premeditated. I got my first clue of Phil's whereabouts from a rum-soaked piece of human driftwood who claimed to have seen him wandering, hatless and disheveled, among the sand dunes.

"Hanted he looked for sure, sir," he mumbled, blinking his bleary eyes at me. "For all the world like the ghost of the pore, pretty lady he murdered wouldn't give him no rest. All he done was stare out at the sea like he was listenin' for somethin'—listenin' for somethin'. It's hanted he is for sure!"

IT WAS among the dunes that I finally found him. At first I couldn't believe it was Phil. He was changed—terribly. His eyes were the eyes of a man struggling vainly to understand some nameless horror that had befallen him; the selfsame look was doubtless in the eyes of the first fallen angel when he felt the barriers of hell closing around him. He stared at me in a curious, groping fashion as if I were some stranger whose identity had eluded him.

"For God's sake, what's the matter?" I pleaded.

"I wish I knew," he answered dully. "I—wish—I—knew."

I fairly hurled my next question at him.

"Where is Sari Threnow?"

He made a little, impotent gesture toward the sea.

"D'you mean she's drowned?" I cried.

It seemed centuries before Phil replied.

"No. There are some things you can't drown."

"Cut out the riddles," I begged. "Back in the village they're saying you murdered Sari Threnow. Of course I know that's nonsense. But I'm here to find out what happened."

"The village can say what it damn pleases and if I told you the truth you wouldn't believe me. Go away and leave me alone, Bob."

"Of course I'm not going," I said quietly. "Sit down, Phil! Quit prowling around staring at the sea! You make me as nervous as a cat. Cigarette?"

He took one, not from a desire to smoke, but because he wanted something to twist with his fingers, and he seemed tormented by some inner restlessness that drove him to continual bodily movement. As he talked, I knew his mind was not on what he was saying: there was a hushed expectancy in his attitude that brought back the words of the bit of human

driftwood with maddening persistency: "Listenin' for somethin'—hanted he is for sure!"

"You'll think I'm crazy, Bob," Phil began. "Maybe I am, but I don't think so—yet. From the first time I looked into Sari Threnow's green eyes, I was like a man possessed. There was a mystery and an elusiveness about her that maddened me almost as much as the clinging persistence with which she drew me to her—a persistence that gave me a horrible sensation of being caught in a net and smothered—a net woven of her soft yellow hair."

He broke off sharply.

"Did you hear anything, old man?"

"Nothing but the wind," I said. "Go on."

"She was obsessed by a strange passion for the sea. That last night, we were walking on the beach and she tilted her face toward me in the moonlight and I—I'd never touched her before, you understand—I crushed here in my arms and kissed her. And Bob" (his voice shook), "her lips tasted salt and they were cold and clammy to the touch like the belly of a fish. As they clung to mine, I swear I felt them drawing something holy from me, something that, to lose, takes all the color and meaning from life and leaves it only an empty horror. Then she slipped from my arms like water and I saw—so help me God!—that she was a thing with a tail like a fish. She laughed at me as she dived into the sea—and this holy thing she stole from me went with her. You know the tale the old women tell of mermaids who come out of the sea to seek for a soul from men like me. . . ."

"What utter drivel!" I croaked.

I was having difficulty controlling my vocal cords.

"Why, it's monstrous—you're just plain—"

Here my speaking apparatus deserted me entirely.

"Crazy!" rasped Phil savagely. "Go on and say it! Listen—wasn't that some one calling?"

I felt the goose flesh rising in tiny prickles on my skin as I asked a question whose answer I already knew.

"Who is it you're listening for, Phil?"

"That—thing—with a tail like a fish. Sometime—I'll hear it call—out there in the depths of the sea. Then, who knows? I may gain back my—soul."

"See here," I fumed, "I've heard all I can stand of this! Some decent food and a hot bath will work wonders with you. You're going home with me."

Phil turned his face toward the sea. It was as if already he had forgotten I was there. I dragged him to his feet, ignoring the dangerous glitter that flared into his blue eyes at my touch on his arm.

"You're going home with me," I repeated.

A quirk that fell short of being a smile twisted one corner of his mouth.

"An army mule is a tractable fairy compared to you, Bob. But remember this. I'm coming back. And I'm coming alone!"

For five restless days and as many nights he tramped the shore of the sea. He ate almost nothing and he slept only when outraged nature snatched him into short periods of dream-harried oblivion. The sixth night, he heard the call for which he waited—but it was not Sari Threnow, after all, who gave back the soul to the body of Philip Sanborne. A frantic pounding at my door in the black rain-lashed hours of the early morning jerked me into instant wakefulness. Pulling on a perfunctory array of clothes as I ran, I stumbled downstairs and shot the bolt. I don't know whom I expected to find, but

assuredly not Mary McKee. She was drenched to the bone; her flimsy dress was whipped to ribbons by the gale; and the only spot of color on her face was a great, livid bruise on her cheek.

"Hurry," she gasped. "I'm afraid Phil is dead—dead, I tell you! He's lying in his motor boat down at the wharf. Hurry!"

Phil's limp form was a dead weight as I bore him home through the storm; there was the faintest flutter of breath in his nostrils, and that was all.

It was while we waited his return to consciousness that Mary said, "Of course you're wondering what happened. Most of it is a meaningless, garbled blur to me, but I'll try to tell you. With the coming of the wind and the rain, I had a strange presentiment that some evil thing of the sea menaced Phil. I think it's because I love him so much that I knew. I've always loved him, you know—always—" Mary's low voice trailed off in a sagging diminuendo as if flattened into nothingness by the weight of unbidden memories. Quick tears brimmed Nancy's eyes.

"And then, dear?" Nancy prompted gently.

"Of course I thought of Phil's motor boat," resumed Mary, "so I hurried down to the wharf. I got there as he was putting out to sea. I begged him to stay with me, but he didn't hear a word I said. I was crazy with fright. I clung to him but he shook me off and once he even—"

Mechanically, one of her hands touched her bruised cheek. At Nancy's cry of pity, she flamed, "Don't you dare blame Phil for that! In his right mind he'd die sooner than strike a woman! I managed to crawl into the boat and then things went hazy. When my head cleared, I realized that we were heading toward the open sea. Phil steered by sound rather than direction, though—he kept listening—listening. Oh, it was horrible! The boat bobbed around like a cork gone mad. I knew I'd have to do something, and that soon. I pawed around in the blackness (Phil always leaves his tools pitched helter-skelter) and as luck would have it I found a big monkey-wrench—a horrid, murderous thing. Clutching it, I crept toward him on my hands and knees. It seemed the only way out. Just as I was ready to—to—he crumpled up in a heap, flabby as a rag doll. I didn't touch him. I'll swear to that! I'm a good sailor, but God only knows how I ever made land. But I'm afraid it wasn't any good after all. Phil wants to die."

As if to bear witness to the truth of her words, Phil's eyes opened. Accusingly they probed Mary's stricken face.

"You dragged me back to face life without a soul," he whispered. "I'll never forgive you—never. Please go away quietly where I'll never have to look at you again."

Then he turned his face to the wall and lay there for long hours without moving. Never for the tick of a second was he free from the tormenting thought that he had lost his soul. His former restlessness gave way to an apathy far more alarming. He did not sleep unless under the influence of an opiate. Physically, he was sound enough, although unbelievably weakened from exposure, under-nourishment and worry, but mentally he was a wreck.

"I'm an obscene, unspeakable thing, Bob," he would mutter, "a man without a soul, haunted by eyes green as the treacherous shoals that lie at the edge of the sea—greedy green eyes forever laughing at me and the tang of salt on my mouth. God!"

DAY or night we never left him; at 3 o'clock in the morning came my time to relieve Mary. The fourth morning, instead of greeting me with her usual tired little nod and slipping

away to bed, she faced me with her head thrown back and her shoulders squared. She was a gallant fighter, was Mary!

"Phil is dying by inches. But I won't let him die! I won't! Bob, you're pretty much of a heathen, but even a heathen prays to the gods he fashions. If you'd try it might help me."

In a shadowy corner of the room I waited and shivered as if with the ague. To my distorted fancy, Phil's face, as stark as the face of a corpse, floated in the eery pool of light spilled by a pale boudoir lamp. I gave a great gasp of relief when Mary bent over him, for the face of Mary was the face of life incarnate. The poised serene beauty of it brought an ache to my throat.

"Philip dear," I heard her plead, "listen to me carefully. If a kiss can take away the soul from the body of a man, surely, surely a kiss can give it back to him! That is only reasonable, isn't it? If some evil thing has robbed a man of his soul, I know the kiss of the woman who loves him can help him find it again. The love kiss of a woman can bring anything—anything—to a man if he will only believe—and believe hard enough."

I hid my face in my hands as her head drooped toward him, for there are some things it is sacrilege to watch. There came a long, long silence; then softly, slowly as if from an infinite distance I heard Phil's voice.

"Your eyes, Mary—I'm glad God made them gray and kind as the smoke that curls upward from a man's hearth-fire. If you'll kiss me again—I think—I think—I can go to sleep."

Twenty-four hours later, he woke and shouted for his clothes; he grew incensed when they were not immediately forthcoming and nursed a sense of injury because Nancy refused to cook him a porterhouse smothered in onions.

When he and Mary were married, he carried her away to a pleasant little sun-baked town in western Kansas, and they have a husky young hopeful now whom they call Bob. If one is disposed to accept literally his parents' glowing accounts of their progeny, Bob is a paragon of all the childish virtues. He has only one peculiarity; he cannot bear the sight of a fish, and a body of running water sends him into paroxysms of terror.

DEAF, DUMB, and BLIND

By

C. M. EDDY, JR.

A grisly story of the powers of evil

In WEIRD TALES Next Month

On Sale At All News Stands March First

Filipino Superstition, and Belated Justice

A Gaddaan Alaad

By GEORGE BALLARD BOWERS

Author of "That White Superiority"

DETECTION of crime by American officers in the Philippine Islands depends largely upon their knowledge of native customs and beliefs and their ability to interpret correctly the pagan rites and ceremonies commonly practised in peasant society.

Alaad is a ceremony to lay a ghost. It is frequently practised by criminals along the Cagayan River of northern Luzon to propitiate the spirits of their dead victims.

Two little boys had been cruelly murdered without any apparent motive. The murderer had not left the slightest clue to aid the police. The American captain, knowing the customs of the locality, suspended all fruitless search except to watch for announcements of forthcoming *alaads*. His wait was rewarded by the capture and conviction of the guilty man.

WHEN the nervous pony espied the two little boys playing in the ford, he stopped stock-still to pitch his rider over his head into the water. The little fellows laughed with childish glee while the superstitious hunter held his rearing mount with one hand to recover his fallen lance with the other.

The childish laughter was an ill omen. The enraged hunter swung into his saddle, with long lance poised, and started in pursuit of the frightened, fleeing boys already out of the river in the open meadow. Before his companion could divine his purpose, the infuriated man had swept up the smaller boy on his lance. Without reining in his mount, he shook off the bleeding body to impale the second, a boy of eight, who, in the meantime, seeing escape impossible, had stopped so as to be better able to parry the thrusts.

The pony galloped past, and the point of the lance missed by a foot. At a signal from his rider, he circled so that the man might not lose control of his long weapon. Anticipating the second attack, the boy ran toward his assailant, but he was no match for his skill. As the hunter swept past, he released the shaft, and the blade found its victim's breast. The trained animal turned and trotted back to stop beside the kill.

The rider dismounted, withdrew his lance, then returned to the ford to wash its crimson blade.

His frightened companion waited for him to speak.

"Thou, Carlos, hast seen. Tell at thy peril."

"I saw nothing, master."

They mounted. The hunter Domingo led the way, avoiding the little brown bodies under the circling vultures. An hour later they stopped; the hunter had reached home. He dismounted, threw the rein to his companion, to greet his little daughter Maria waiting at the door. He took her in his arms gently and, with his nose pressed into her soft cheek, in-

haled again and again. Maria was a dainty brown creature of five. The rude hunter loved her as dearly as his own life. He told her of his unsuccessful hunt and of his disappointment in not having brought her the timid fawn promised at his departure. She patted his cheeks while he resumed his caresses.

NEARLY a year had gone by. The two little boys playing in the river had been forgotten. One day little Maria complained of pain. The crimson had gone from her brown cheeks. Domingo, her father, sent Carlos to fetch the village *babalyan*, witch-doctor, while he himself prepared the sacrifice. He had no faith in the cures of the white man.

The old *babalyan* came promptly, for Domingo was a rich man. He took the sacrifice—a white rooster, some rice and a quart of wine—to a banyan tree deep in the forest, where he left them for the departed spirits reputed to be living in that sacred tree. If Domingo had not been rich and powerful the sacrifice might have found its way into the *babalyan's* kitchen instead.

The old witch-doctor returned from the forest to make some Christian crosses over the sick child, mumbled a Latin phrase or two, then assured Domingo that his daughter was on the road to recovery.

But in spite of the sacrifice and the crosses, Maria did not improve. The *babalyan* returned again and again, but the tiny body only grew more frail. Finally Domingo and the *babalyan* had a long secret conference, after which it was announced that Domingo, the wealthiest man of the Magat valley, would give an *alaad*.

The spirits of the two little boys he had so ruthlessly slain were tormenting his daughter. An *alaad* would put them to rest.

Domingo had a busy week. He went from house to house to invite his neighbors to come to his home for an entire day. He assured each that there would be an abundance of food, drink and amusement.

At daybreak of the eventful day the guests began to assemble. As Domingo was a man of wealth, it was known that he would serve a bounteous feast. Two fat hogs had been killed to be roasted whole over a bed of live coals. Great pots of rice were prepared to provide *canin* to eat with the roasted flesh. Jars of fermented coconut-tuba had been brought from a distant grove and two demijohns of distilled *vino* invited those wishing something stronger.

By 10 o'clock the laughing, black-eyed señoritas, powdered and bejeweled, had arrived to range themselves around the wall of the room, sitting on clean, new mats provided for the occasion. Each smoked her favorite cigarette or a *tustus* rolled of nipa leaf with a heart of fragrant tobacco. Some of the older men sat on their haunches in the center of the room drinking tuba or chewing betelnut and pepper leaf, to expectorate the blood-red juices into the cracks of the bamboo floor.

THE three musicians struck their guitars several times as a warning. Time for the dance to begin. The men cleared the center of the room while the servant, Carlos, wiped the bamboo floor with an old burlap rice-sack. The tinkling music moved the young men, smoking languidly outside, to draw nearer so as better to ogle the maidens who smiled encouragingly from within.

One young man, bolder than his companions, laid his half-finished cigar on a convenient post, to enter. He went straight to Domingo's sister, bowed and offered his arm. After casting her *tustus* through the open window, she slowly arose to her feet, grasped the tail of her long skirt in

her left hand and with her right on the shoulder of her gallant partner, they whirled away in a giddy waltz. Emboldened by the sight of the dancing couple, other young men entered to seek partners.

The old men outside took turns at the poles of the roasting carcasses, while the married women prepared the rice and spread broad banana leaves on the kitchen floor to serve as tables for the guests.

After many long and noisy disputes, the roasts were pronounced cooked. With a heavy machete the steaming meat was divided into chunks about the size of a man's hand, to be heaped on round bamboo trays.

While the men carved the meat, the women heaped the steaming white rice on the banana leaves that they had made ready on the floor. Trays of meat were set at intervals between the two rows of rice piles. At each pile there was a bowl of water, not for drinking, but for washing the fingers and rinsing the mouth of red betelnut juice. No knives, forks or spoons were provided for the guests.

When all was ready, the host clapped, and the dancers stopped whirling to find places along the lines of rice piles. The men sat on their haunches nearest the door through which they had entered, while the women squatted at the farther end on the lines near the fireplace with its kitchen pots and the tethered hunting dogs.

The maidens daintily dipped their fingers without lifting the bowls, while the men raised theirs to their lips and rinsed their mouths noisily, using any water remaining in the bowls to wash their hands, which they dried on their flowing shirt-tails. Those nearest the meat served others, first protecting each proffered piece with a portion of banana leaf.

Eating commenced. Each guest inserted the fingers of his right hand in his pile of rice. With a few deft movements, a handful was pressed into a ball about the size of a walnut, to be shot into the mouth with the thumb, followed by a piece of the juicy roast.

After an hour the meat trays had been emptied and the rice stacks leveled. No scraps remained, each guest had tossed his to the hungry, impatient dogs, whining in the corner.

After each guest had eaten his fill and cigarettes and *tustus* had passed around, all returned to the room from which they had been called. The young folks did not resume their dancing, but half reclined on mats and benches.

Someone suggested that the old folks dance the *balitao* of the ancient past. While they danced, the onlookers beat the time with clapping hands and improvised words as they sang.

The crowd soon tired of the dancing. It was suggested that the old story-teller, brought from a distant village, begin his part of the entertainment. He regaled them with weird tales of fights with crocodiles endowed with spirits of the slain enemies of the Gaddaan people, of monster pythons and of a buffalo that had killed his master after he had been bewitched by the spirit of a departed enemy. He explained how sickness was not a condition of the body, as the hated white man taught, but was due to the malign influence of the departed. The significance of the *alaad* was explained, and hearers warned that anything they might hear was as sacred as a mother's trust. No true Gaddaan would ever reveal the secret of an *alaad*. With this admonition he closed his part of the ceremony.

The closing event of the celebration was Domingo's confession. To propitiate the spirits of the two he had slain he must make a public

confession. No names need be mentioned, and the story might be told in allegory.

Domingo took his place at the end of the room that he might scan the faces of his hearers. His face was flushed with excitement. He was thinking of his little Maria, whose cheeks would again show crimson. He did not fear his guests. No Gaddaan has ever betrayed the secret of the *alaad*.

He coughed, cleared his throat, then began:

"One day last harvest time, while returning from an unsuccessful hunt on the great plain toward the setting sun, I started to cross the creek Santos, near where it joins the mighty Magat. I had just entered the water when my horse shied at two fawns playing there. He threw me over his head into the water. The pain of the fall was so great that I could not control my anger. I remounted my horse. I gave chase to the fawns that caused my mishap. I caught the first on my lance. I shook him off. He was dead. The other fawn turned upon me. I let go my lance and it pierced him in the breast. It is the *anitos* of the little fawns that I would send to rest by my *alaad* today; they make sick my little Maria."

Domingo had obeyed the law of his ancestors. His secret was with his people.

There was a deathlike silence. Domingo had dropped upon his knees, with head bowed. His lips moved in a silent prayer that had been taught him by a zealous Christian monk when he was yet a child. His guests looked knowingly at each other, then slipped away one by one.

When darkness had fallen a childish voice called faintly, "*Tatay, tatay. Ari co.*"

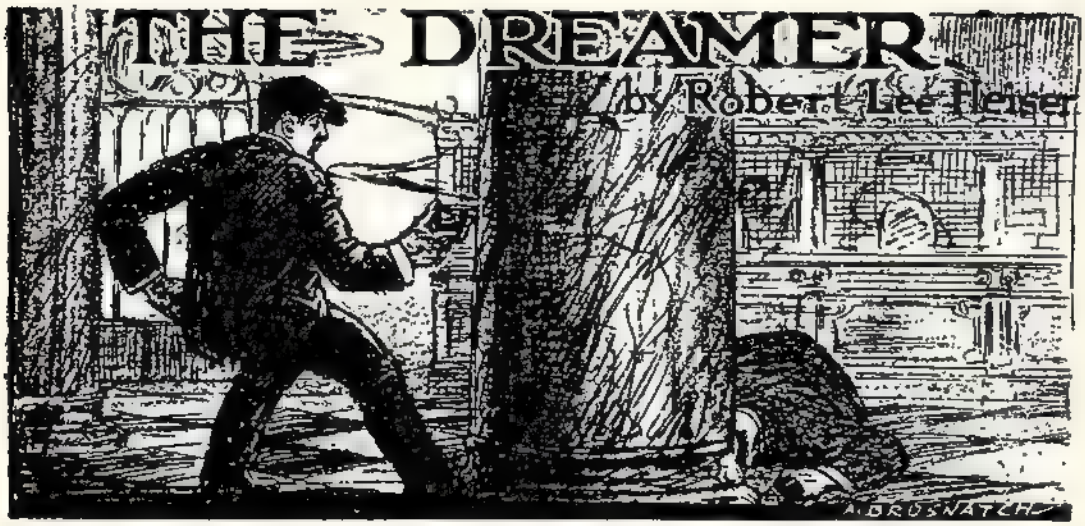
Domingo obeyed her summons.

Within the little room where the sick child lay, he found her mother praying before a crucifix. He dropped to his knees beside her to wait and watch. At the first streak of dawn the little voice on the mat whispered, "*Tatay, Nanay*", but before the parents could answer her call, she was dead. Her *anito* had gone to seek the two little fawns.

The mother threw herself over the clay that had been her child and sobbed silently. Domingo stood up to listen. He had heard unfamiliar sounds, footfalls made by shoe-clad feet, metal striking against metal like cartridges dropping into a magazine, then two harsh noises as if riflebolts had been shot into place carelessly. Heavy footfalls struck the paths.

Someone near the kitchen door tried to smother a cough. After a short silence, another boldly ascended the front steps. Then a loud knock sounded on the door and a gruff voice called, "*Tao, po, tao, po*". The speaker demanded admittance.

Domingo tiptoed to the window, then whispered hoarsely, "*Justicia, justicia*". He lowered the window gently as if not to waken his little Maria, and opened the door to face a burly Filipino sergeant and two rifles pointing from the ground.



Author of "Adventure of Souls"

WITH Phantom Dick backing across the tiled floor of the National Bank, smoke curling lazily from the end of his pistol barrel, the echoes still ringing in the dome of the spacious banking establishment while gongs on the police patrol clanged in the canyons of the financial district, would you dare suggest to the bank cashier, sprawled on the floor in a pool of his life's blood, that Phantom Dick was made of the stuff of dreams?

Certainly not. But if you have studied the human being all of your life you will have learned much and there will be one thing to puzzle you: there goes the man down the street, a wonderful machine of flesh, blood and bone, undoubtedly the greatest thing of creation. If he is a friend of yours he will stop, smile, extend his hand and speak to you. That is true but—ah, here's the rub!—he gets sick and dies.

Now, you look upon the man. Even the masters of medicine and surgery will tell you that you look upon the same man. He is all there. Blood, bone and flesh. But he will not get up, he will not speak to you, he will not shake your hand, he will not smile, he will not look at you. Why?

The medical experts will tell you that the man is dead. Everyone who looks upon the dead man will say "he is gone." What do they mean by that? Is he not in plain view? Have the medical men not said that it is the same man, nothing missing? But his small son, three years old, who has never heard of the thing called a man's soul, will say "Daddy's gone." What does he mean? Who told him?

Now, listen to the story of Richard Stafford, the dreamer, and Phantom Dick, the thief. You be the judge.

RICHARD STAFFORD was a dreamer. He taught himself to dream; when he was a boy the dreams came naturally from eating too much before he was chased off to bed, and breaking the laws of nature generally. The one peculiar thing about Richard's dreams was that they were, as a rule, pleasant dreams. He always awoke before the lion or tiger snatched him and he came to the point where he found extreme delight in the adventuresome land of Nod. He never dreamed of muddy streams of water, snakes, lizards and the like; his dreams were of roses, beautiful valleys, babbling brooks, birds and (when he grew older) pretty women.

Richard was always the hero in his dreams.

Richard dreamed that he was visiting San Francisco. Then he awoke. He might just as well have been there in person because the resultant gratification was just as complete. He decided to try going where he desired, by prearrangement, in his dreams. The first trials were rather confusing; he could not be sure that it was a success. Then he went to bed with his mind made up to visit Pittsburgh.

Sure enough, he found himself walking up Smithfield Street; he saw the huge, blinking, electric sign over Keith's Vaudeville House; he heard the rumble of the trains coming in overhead on the Wabash Railroad; he walked out on the Sixth Street bridge, hung over the railing and watched the steamers plowing down the river with their tow of coal barges. And then he awoke.

Of course Richard did not for a moment believe that he had visited Pittsburgh in person, but he did know that he had learned to dream at will. He could go on any kind of an adventure he desired and always find himself safely at home, in bed, the next morning. So Richard found great delight in dreaming.

Richard lived on a farm near a small town called Kanada which was just forty miles from a great, roaring, bustling city of a million souls. He seldom visited the city because there was too much to be done on the farm. When he had any spare time he would call his dog, Jack, shoulder his shotgun and go hunting, in the winter for rabbit and in the summer for groundhog. These were his great pleasures: his dog, his gun and his dreams.

In the big city, forty miles away, without the knowledge of Richard, lived Enid Quigley. Enid was simply one of the city's working girls. There are many Enids, and this one was employed at the Crown Cork and Seal Works as a typist. She had come to the big city from a small town along a railroad.

One evening, as Enid came home from her work, she was surprized to see a good-looking young man seated on the front steps of her boarding house.

The young man leapt to his feet, removed his hat, bowed, and mumbled some excuse for being in the way of her passage.

"It's all right, no harm done," said Enid, and she passed inside, wondering if he could possibly be a new boarder.

"Mrs. Thorbold," said Enid, addressing the boarding house lady as that personage leaned over to fill a handleless, cracked cup with coffee, "who is the new boarder?"

"Why, dearie, there is no new boarder. What do you mean?"

"I passed a young man, on my way in, who seemed to be making himself at home on the front steps—"

"Oh, him? Why, he just happened along. He comes often. Generally he comes with his dog, seats himself on the steps, smokes his pipe and goes on about his business. Whatever his business might be. I never asked him. But if he has bothered you—"

"No, no, not that! I just saw him there and wondered who he might be. Good-looking, isn't he?"

After supper, when the electric lights on the corner had blazed forth and all the little children had come out to dance while the organ grinder turned his crank and jerked on the monkey's chain, Enid, prettily dressed, came to the front steps.

She found the young man still seated there. His dog—big, black and white spotted—was lying at his master's feet, tongue out and panting, for it was summer and the evening was warm. The young man was twirling his cap on his finger as he smiled at

the antics of the organ grinder's monkey.

"Good evening," he greeted the girl as if he had known her and had expected her arrival.

He stood there until Enid had seated herself on the steps; then he, too, reseated himself.

"Nice evening," he said again, looking at the girl as if he wondered why she did not reply.

"It is," she replied shortly.

Enid wondered who in the world this forward young man could be.

Now, it is impossible for a young lady and a young man to sit side by side on the front steps of a boarding house with the music of a hurdy-gurdy in their ears and questions in their minds without becoming a bit friendly. Rules of society do not fit in with these occasions.

"You board here?" asked the young man.

"I do, and you do not."

"Oh, no, I live in a beautiful apartment on Riverside Avenue. Me and my dog—and my friends."

"Oh, I see." She did not see, though. "I work at the Crown Cork and Seal Works."

"I know that. Your name is Enid Quigley and you are pretty. I am a thief."

There is no doubt but that Enid Quigley should have been shocked at this candid triplicate statement. But the fact is, she did not believe the last statement and the first two pleased her vanity.

"A thief?"

"Yes, I am Phantom Dick, and this is my dog."

At this Enid felt her heart fluttering under her shirtwaist and tried to make up her mind whether to believe this young man, get up and run into the boarding house, or disbelieve him and sit still.

For surely, Enid Quigley, like every other person in the big city forty miles from Kanada, either knew of or had heard tell of Phantom Dick, the master mind of the most daring band of criminals the big city had ever known. Loot valued at millions had been stolen by his gang and many murders were credited to them; but the police and newspaper men insisted that Dick never killed a man: he sat at a big, highly polished, smooth table, down in the underworld, planned the jobs and instructed his men how to pull them. None of the policemen had ever seen Phantom Dick, but they had often seen his dog. That was the thing that marked a bank burglary, hold-up or murder as being one of Phantom Dick's jobs. The police always managed to arrive in time to see the dog leaving the scene.

The girl laughed. The young man smiled. A big, flat-footed policeman came along the sidewalk, swinging his stick at the end of its strap. He noticed the dog, stopped and looked at him for a few seconds, stood there scratching his chin, and eventually smiled upon the pair seated on the steps.

"Looks like Phantom Dick's dog," laughed the policeman.

"You are right, officer, it is Phantom Dick's dog and I am Phantom Dick," and the young man smiled good-naturedly.

The big policeman threw his head back and laughed heartily at the joke. Perhaps he wished that it might be Phantom Dick and his dog, for there was a reward of $25,000 for Phantom Dick, dead or alive.

"No one believes me," complained the young man to the girl after the policeman had passed on.

"Really, now, I can see no reason why they should not believe you," she said sarcastically.

The young man pulled at his cap thoughtfully, and finally said, "We need a woman, a daring woman, a pretty woman, to assist us in our work. Would you like to join us?"

"Oh, surely," still sarcastically. Enid enjoyed the joke. "I should dearly love to be the queen of a band of cut-throats. Where is your den?"

"Den?" The young man eyed her narrowly. "Before you can visit our stronghold you must assist in a hold-up. This evening we are going to rob a bank. The National Bank. It is open until 9 o'clock, and I believe the results will be well worth our trouble. You're going along?"

"Of course I am; come on!" And the girl leapt to her feet as if she would offer the young man a dare.

The young man put his cap on, snapped his fingers to his dog, and the three of them—Phantom Dick, the girl and the dog—threaded their way among the children who danced to the music of the hurdy-gurdy.

ENID expected that she would be led to a moving picture theater, or probably to a soda water fountain. Her companion called a taxicab. The ride was not a long one, and they were soon on the pavement before the National Bank. The big doors were open and the streets were filled with hurrying pedestrians. For a moment the girl was frightened, but before she could object she was being introduced to a number of well-dressed men.

"Boys, this is Enid Quigley, who wishes to assist us in robbing the National Bank. Mind you do no shooting. It might frighten her."

The men laughed. They looked to be well-to-do business men. None was below the age of thirty.

"The only way he can rob the bank is by presenting his bank book to the cashier," laughed the girl.

Some of the men raised their eyebrows. All of them acknowledged the introduction. Then the young man walked away, followed by the girl and the dog, and as they entered the bank doors, Joe Sandwood, patrolman, standing half way up the block, fished out his lookout sheet and stood rubing his chin in thought. He walked to the box and was soon in communication with his captain.

"I know, Sam, it might be foolish. Possibly just a strange dog. But I'm going up there to investigate and if it should turn out to be Phantom Dick and his gang—well, I'll be glad to know that some of the boys are behind me when the gats start barking," said Patrolman Sandwood.

Enid thought the bank watchman looked sick as she passed him, just inside the big doors, for his face was pale and his lips were trembling. He was not looking at her, but rather at something behind her. She had no time to investigate, for the young man was walking rapidly toward the cashier's window and she hurried to keep up.

If Enid had any doubt, now, about this being the real Phantom Dick, the doubts were quickly dispelled. Dick crowded his way through the line of people at the cashier's window, thrusting them aside as he came forward. He whipped an ugly pistol from beneath his coat, thrust it through the window and remarked, in a rather calm voice, considering the circumstances:

"Stick 'em up!"

The little, bald-headed cashier obeyed without question. To say that Enid was shocked hardly explains the situation. She could not collect her wits. She turned her head and saw the bank watchman crouching against a marble pillar. A well-dressed gentleman stood before him with a pistol pointed at the metal badge on his vest. Two more well-dressed gentlemen were herding the customers against the wall.

She saw another well-dressed gentleman dumping packages of money into the yawning mouth of a leather satchel. She felt something hard and cold pressed against the palm of her hand and closed her fingers on the object; in the excitement that fol-

lowed she hardly knew that the object she held was a pistol.

The young man laughed, caught the satchel that the gentleman threw over the top of the cage, pushed the girl toward the big doors, and as they backed out the loud explosion of a pistol echoed and re-echoed in the big room and the girl saw one of the well-dressed gentlemen backing across the tiled floor with smoking pistols in either hand. A man staggered through the door which led to the cashier's cage and came unsteadily toward the man who was backing away. "Bang!" and the staggering man pitched forward and slithered several feet across the tiling from the force of his fall.

As PHANTOM DICK and the girl hurried across the pavement, the gong of the police patrol could be heard in the streets, and pedestrians were running in all directions. A pistol shot rang out and Joe Sandwood, patrolman, who had pulled his weapon up in line with Phantom Dick's back as he leapt into the taxi behind the girl, threw his arms in the air, wheeled twice and crumpled to the pavement.

The driver of the taxi stepped on the gas and they were away with a white and black spotted dog doing his best to keep up with the automobile.

The machine stopped in a dark street. The young man leapt out and half dragged the bewildered girl after him. The taxi was off almost before they had alighted.

The pair hurried up a flight of stairs, passed into a dark hall and back to where an elevator was hidden by heavy portieres. The elevator took them up, up, up, but the girl had no means of knowing how high, for Phantom Dick operated the lift by himself and the girl was hysterical with fright.

Enid soon found herself in an elegantly furnished room; a large, square table was in the exact center of the heavily carpeted floor, and about this table were collected four of the men she had been introduced to in front of the bank. One was standing, his knuckles on the polished table top. His hat was off and his hair was disarrayed; a streak of dry blood marked his face from the hair at his temple to the point of his chin; his vest was open except for the last button down and looked as if it had been torn open violently, as it had been. His shirt front was rumpled and dirty and his collar was torn. There was a haunted look in his eyes, for this man was a killer and he had barely had time to reach the automobile to join his escaping companions.

"Ah-h-h!" said this man, long and drawn out like the sound people make when they see a skyrocket burst gloriously in the air; and he was joined by the others with the same exclamation as Phantom Dick threw the satchel upon the table top. "Got it, eh?" Sweat was streaming over the man's cheeks.

The money was dumped upon the table. Phantom Dick divided equally, dollar for dollar, until there was a pile for each man. This was unusual, for the leader had never before accepted any of the loot. His share was the adventure. The bandits looked from one to the other, gathered up their piles and slipped away into the dark hallway.

Dick turned his attention to Enid, who was prone on the couch, her shoulders heaving with deep sobs. The girl had seen that these men were hard, desperate criminals and she was terribly frightened.

"Well, that is no way for the queen of a band of cut-throats to act," said Dick, standing over the girl.

"Oh, what shall I do? I dare not go home. The police would recognize me and I could never explain."

"Quite right. But why should you go home? Here you have all that

your heart could desire. The gang do not skimp on expenditures for furnishing their meeting place; and as for money, here's your share."

Dick handed the package, which his brother thieves had supposed he intended to keep, to the girl.

Enid did not extend her hand for the money. Instead she covered her face with her hands, and Dick threw the package into her lap.

"Even the gang know me as Phantom Dick. I am not always here to plan their depredations. When I leave it will be up to you to fill my shoes. That is why I brought you here. You will learn in time."

Dick suddenly felt something stir his heart. He looked at the weeping girl for a moment, then he stooped, gathered her in his arms, and in spite of her objections he pressed his lips against hers. . . .

RICHARD STAFFORD awoke. He was all tangled up in the bed sheets. The dream had been so realistic that he expected to find Enid Quigley in his arms. He fumbled about his waist for the pistols he believed he would find there. The alarm clock was clanging, although it was still dark. He had set the clock that he might be awake when his neighbor, one Henry Wilkins, called to go hunting groundhogs that were playing havoc with the corn.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed, running his fingers through his hair· "what an adventure that was!"

Then, after thinking over the dream for a few minutes, he laughed heartily.

Henry Wilkins came stamping up on the back porch, hammered loudly on the kitchen door and was scolded roundly by Richard's mother for awakening the entire household.

Richard came down, opened the door, greeted his friend and went out into the yard to call his dog.

"Jack!" he called. "Here, Jack!"

Richard could not locate the dog, and he returned to the house to fill his pockets with shells. He walked to the gate with Henry Wilkins, where he again called the dog. After waiting for perhaps ten minutes the two men decided that the dog had strayed away, and the hunting trip was given up.

Later, shortly after noon, Richard started for Kanada and the post office to get the mail. As he passed through the gate leading to the roadway he saw his dog coming. The dog's tongue was lolling out and his body was wet with sweat.

"Well, where have you been?" Richard stood looking at the dog with a puzzled frown on his face. "I wonder if you've been to the city, too?"

Then Richard passed on down the road laughing at what he considered a foolish thought.

"The dog had followed some hunters who had passed before the alarm clock went off," thought Richard.

At the post office Richard found several letters for other members of the family, and the morning paper. He placed the letters in his coat pocket and started back up the road for home, tearing the wrapper off the newspaper as he walked along.

He unfolded the paper, and the big letters (railroad type the printers call them) seemed to leap at him: "PHANTOM DICK PULLS ANOTHER BANK JOB."

The hand holding the paper trembled. Richard looked about, half expecting to see the constable of Kanada approaching with a pair of clanking handcuffs. But again he laughed, although this time the laugh was halfhearted, for Richard Stafford, the dreamer, was not quite so sure of himself.

Arriving at home he went immediately to his room, seated himself near a window, spread the paper out on a small stand and read practically the

same thing he had dreamed, except there was no mention of Enid Quigley or the bandit's headquarters in Riverside Avenue.

Considering the matter calmly, Richard came to the conclusion that his dream had been merely a coincidence. There were no night trains from the big city to Kanada, and Richard had no automobile. It would have been impossible to go and come without attracting attention at home. No, he had likely read something in reference to Phantom Dick and this led him to dream; coincidentally the dream was almost the same thing that actually happened.

For the balance of that day it worried him a bit, but as the days spread to weeks and the weeks to months he forgot the whole affair and went about his work and pleasures in the same fashion as he always had.

THEN, one day, he called his dog and traveled in to Kanada. He stopped at the post office as usual, and on his way out he almost ran into a girl who was about to enter.

"I beg your—"

Richard's mouth fell open. He was so startled that he could not form the other word. The girl was an exact image of the Enid Quigley of his dreams.

The girl, herself, seemed none the less disturbed. She placed her hand to her throat and stood staring at the young man. Finally her eyes caught sight of the dog at Richard's heels.

"Phantom Dick!"

"I am afraid we have both made a mistake," said Richard, regaining control of himself.

"Well, you are an exact counterpart of the mysterious bank robber whose exploits the newspapers have been recounting, and you can hardly blame me for being startled," explained the girl.

"And you are the lady of my dreams. I once dreamed that I had a wonderful adventure with a girl who was a dead ringer for you, except, perhaps, that she did not dress as well as you."

"I wonder," started the girl, eyeing Richard intently, "I wonder if I am mistaken, after all?"

"If you will explain yourself—"

The girl did explain this: she was the new cashier at the bank, she was boarding with Mrs. Henry Wilkins, and she hoped she would see more of Richard.

She did see more of him; for the next three months they were together often and Richard Stafford had proposed to the girl; furthermore she had accepted him, and as far as Richard knew, her name was Grace Maxwell, until the winter had gone and spring was upon them. Then one day Richard found the girl on the porch of Henry Wilkins' house with a yellow sheet of paper in her hand.

As Richard came up on the porch the girl placed her hands behind her.

"What is it? A secret?" asked the young man.

The girl's lips were drawn tight, her eyelids were half closed, and she came so close to Richard that he felt her warm breath fanning his cheek.

"I'm going to show you this telegram," said the girl in a decidedly serious voice.

And she did. The message was from the big city and it said briefly, "Well, have you got things lined up yet?" The signature was "Chuck."

"And now I shall tell you something; I am Enid Quigley."

Richard started, although he had half suspected it.

"If you are not Phantom Dick, I am sadly mistaken," and she told just what Richard Stafford had dreamed. "I am here to get a line on the bank so that the boys can come down and clean its vaults. They are growing impatient at the delay. I am going back to the city to make my report. You say you love me. I

don't know, but I do know that I love you. If I could escape that gang I would never return, but as long as they are out of prison it would be as much as my life is worth to double-cross them. I have no choice in the matter. If you are Richard Stafford, I will simply say good-bye and leave you with the hope that you will not give our plans away, which I know is too much to ask of a respectable man. If you are Phantom Dick you will come to my rescue, for it was Phantom Dick who brought me into their toils."

"I am sorry," replied the young man, and the tone of his voice showed how hurt he was. "I am not the man you know as Phantom Dick. I am Richard Stafford, who, through coincidence, dreamed the same thing that actually happened. I will wait for your return."

And Richard walked away half dazed and sore at heart.

Henry Wilkins came over to visit Richard that evening. They played checkers beside the kitchen stove until it grew late; then Henry accepted the invitation to sleep with him that night so that they might be up early and be off to the woods with their guns and dogs.

Richard heard Henry say something about a groundhog hole out near the upper pasture fence, and drowzily grunted in reply. . . .

ENID QUIGLEY, dressed in an expensive evening gown, was seated on the couch in the finely furnished, big room of the bandits' headquarters on Riverside Avenue. She allowed her eyes to follow her elegantly draped body downwards to the amber cigarette holder in her fingers. The smoke was curling up lazily from the cigarette. Her elbow pressed something hard and she turned her head to see what it was. The elbow was draped across the top of a small stand, and on the stand was a wine decanter of cut glass, handsomely ground. There was red wine in the bottle. When Phantom Dick was in charge the bottle was empty, for he would not tolerate drinking among his men. Perhaps that was why they were never caught.

Enid shook her head much after the fashion of a diver coming up out of the water. She cast her eyes about the room. There in the center was the big table, and seated about it were half a dozen members of the gang. She sighed and went to the head of the table.

"Well," spoke up Chuck, the killer, "shall we pull this pay-roll job before we take on the bank in Kanada?"

"Yes, I think that would be best, and mind, no more drinking. The chap who carries the pay-roll will have the satchel chained to his wrist. You will have to tap him on the head—"

"And, see you, Chuck, no killing. I'll not stand for killings. The next man who kills when it is not necessary will be turned over to the dicks."

Everyone leapt to his feet, for they knew the voice which had interrupted. There stood Phantom Dick. He did not smile. Instead he walked to the small stand, picked up the decanter, and poured the liquid into a jar that held a fern.

"You are careless when I am away. You should have had a guard at the door. I walked in on you without the proper introduction."

The gang crowded forward to shake his hand. Enid stepped forward and placed her hand on his cheek.

"Oh, I'm real enough. I've been attending some business in New York. Now that I am back we shall get busy."

The gang left, one at a time, with a meeting place prearranged. The Dudley Iron Works had been bringing its pay-roll money from the bank after midnight, believing it was fooling the thieves of the big city. Phan-

tom Dick's helpers had learned this and intended to steal the money.

After all had gone, leaving Enid alone with Phantom Dick, the girl sat for a long time watching the leader drumming on the top of the table with his fingertips.

"Dick, were you in Kanada?"

"Me?" and the bandit leader laughed. "Me, in Kanada? What would I be doing in that hick town?"

"That's just it. I would like to know that myself. I have been there for a number of months lining up a job for the boys, and while there I met a man who is a dead ringer for you. Now that I look you over again I can see quite a few differences in your features.

"Dick"—the girl twisted a cigarette to pieces—"Dick, you brought me into this, why?"

"Well, if you must know, because I love you. I am going to marry you and settle down some day."

"But, Dick, this man who is your counterpart, I love him. Do you love me enough to allow me to go to him?"

"Even that, yes." Phantom Dick leaned towards the girl and whispered the rest. "Listen, I am tired of this life. I'm going to drop out. I had not intended to do that so soon, but what you have just told me hurts—it hurts worse than you imagine—"

"I'm sorry, Dick, but—"

"Shut up!" spluttered Dick angrily. "Neither you nor I can be safe as long as any member of this gang is at large. I have a plan. Now don't laugh—I'm going to furnish enough evidence to the police to hang the entire gang, or at least to send them across for a good long time. I'm going to bring the police down on this place this very night!"

"But you—and I—"

"Let me show you how Phantom Dick disappears. You shall disappear with me when the police call. Then you go your way and I'll go mine."

The bandit leader went to the rear of the room and pressed a button that was hidden by folds of draperies. A narrow door slid up.

"That door was arranged so that the gang might escape when the police came. It leads to the roof of the building next door. The skylight is open in preparation always. Tonight I shall arrange for a visit of the flatfoots. You and I shall pass through the door and close it, cutting the gang off."

"But—"

"I know it is not square. I know I'm double-crossing the gang. But I love you, perhaps better than that farmer in the hick town you mentioned, and it was I who brought you into this. It is Phantom Dick who will lead you out at any cost."

Phantom Dick disclosed a telephone cleverly concealed beneath the big table. He called for a number and was soon in communication with the captain of the nearest district police station. He did as he had promised. The information he gave could be verified by the police.

"This is Phantom Dick, himself. I'm sick of the whole rotten business, and I'll promise you that you shall not capture me—I hear 'em coming—you'll have to hurry!" And Phantom Dick flipped the receiver up.

Dick had timed it well, the gang came in with the loot of the pay-roll robbery. As usual, Chuck, the killer, had been up to his tricks.

"What was that!" whispered Chuck as he leaned across the table to glare into the eyes of a companion. The other men leapt to their feet, knocking their chairs over. Phantom Dick was pressing the button. The dog darted into the opening as soon as the door was high enough to admit his body. Enid went next and was closely followed by Phantom Dick.

Dick could not get the door down in time. Chuck had squeezed half way through and was slashing wickedly with a knife. The dog, seeing the danger of his master, leapt at the thief just in time to have his ear nipped off by the knife.

Enid did not wait; she hurried to the skylight and started down, stopping with her head just high enough to see what was taking place on the roof. The rapid explosion of pistols, half deadened by the walls, curses and shouts of the fighting men, came to her ears. She saw Phantom Dick give up his effort to close the door and come racing across the roof with a policeman close at his heels.

"Bang!" rang the report of the policeman's pistol. Phantom Dick did not fall immediately, he stumbled along for half a dozen steps, tripped and fell near the skylight.

"Run!" the girl heard him whisper. "They've got me!"

RICHARD STAFFORD leapt out of bed with a terrible scream in his throat, carrying the bed clothing with him as he went. Henry Wilkins leapt out and snatched a chair.

"What the—what the—" Henry kept repeating over and over as he saw Richard standing, white-faced, on the other side of the bed.

"God! What a dream! I was just killed!" stuttered Richard.

"Well, you darn near scared me to death," answered Henry, preparing to get back in bed. Richard also returned to bed, but not to sleep. He lay there thinking over the strange dream.

Early that morning Richard hurried to the post office, tore the wrapper off the newspaper, and read the glaring headlines: "PHANTOM DICK AND HIS GANG CAPTURED." Richard seated himself on the post office steps to read the article through. The thing that surprized him most was the paragraph: "And Phantom Dick's body is being held at the morgue for identification by relatives. Before he died he made a full and complete confession which will likely send the other members of the gang to the gallows. He denied the assertion of some of those captured that a woman member of the gang had escaped."

The accommodation train was pulling into the station. Richard walked over and stood looking at the few passengers who had alighted. Suddenly one of the passengers, a girl, rushed forward and threw her arms about Richard's neck.

"Oh, I'm so glad that you were not Phantom Dick!"

"Enid!" and Richard gathered the girl into his arms.

As the pair neared the entrance to Henry Wilkins' yard, the dinner bell was sounding. Enid started up the path toward the front porch but Richard called to her to wait a moment.

"I want to see something," said Richard as he waited for his dog to come up to him.

The dog had been running; he was almost exhausted and fell at his master's feet, his head on his paws and his tail barely moving.

Richard reached down, placed his hand under the dog's jowl and raised the head. Sure enough, the ear had been clipped off.

RICHARD STAFFORD has been unable to dream since that time. He is still puzzled. He married Enid and she never mentions her past, neither does Richard mention his dreams, but there are times when he sits smoking his pipe, watching his dog and wondering about Phantom Dick, who gave his life for the woman he loved. Or did he? What is that thing that everyone says "is gone" when a man dies? Think, brother.

Two Youths Listened in on Interplanetary Radio, and Strange Was the Disaster That Befell Them

RADIO V-RAYS

By JAN DIRK

DICK JARVIS and Stan Ross, two young engineering students, lay sprawled in more or less comfortable positions in Dick's room at college. Stan was tall, tanned, and curly-headed. Dick wore the horn-rimmed glasses, mussed hair and preoccupied look of the habitual student. Yet these two, normally of the two extreme types which avoid each other all through college, had been drawn together in the bonds of true friendship by one thing—radio.

On a long shelf which ran along one side of the room, beneath a window through which projected a lead-in insulator, lay a beautiful superheterodyne receiver. Dick's father had been liberal with both his verbal and monetary encouragement, and Dick and his friend Stan Ross had built the gleaming mahogany leviathan of the radio-receiving world as a gift for him in token of their appreciation. Stan was talking, in his easy, carefree voice:

"Well, old kid, there's a DX half-hour starting in three minutes. Unwrap yourself from that soft chair and turn the expense into those little 199's."

Dick grinned his acquiescence as he rose and went to the set. "Which aerial shall we use?" he inquired.

"Oh, the outdoor one, I guess. Try it first, anyway, and then we can change to one of the loops if it's too loud. I've never seen that funny one on the end of the bench, before—I'd like to try it."

"Oh, that one? Ouch!"

Dick was trying to free himself from the grip of a refractory pair of head-phones that had taken a vicious hold upon one ear and a lock of hair.

"That cone-shaped loop is a highly directional affair I built so as to get away from this heavy traffic on San Francisco bay."

He snapped over a filament-controlling toggle switch set into the long bench, and the beautiful set became instantly alive, transformed from a mechanically perfect but inanimate instrument of wood and wire to a living, glowing thing—a Twentieth Century horn of plenty, taking in at one end invisible and inaudible frequencies of electricity and releasing them as man-controlled music and speech.

STAN ROSS plugged in his pair of phones and watched his friend, who was crouched before the superheterodyne, seeking by his trained manipulation of the dials to follow up the faint whistles which the set was pouring into his ears. Three stations four hundred miles to the south in Los Angeles roared in, one after the other, with an intensity sufficient to rattle the sensitive diaphragms of the head-sets. Dick slid his pair forward from his ears, but Stan, a veteran of the days when he and his fellow amateurs had sat long hours into the night with each others' one kilowatt spark stations tearing into their heads from three-step audio amplifiers, only smiled.

"Pretty good, Dick," he shouted. "Those stations down south are all piled together on almost the same wave. I didn't think even the 'het' would separate 'em."

"Sh-h-h!" cautioned Dick. "There's the Calgary station away up north in Canada. I'm going to try the new loop, now—wait a minute."

He removed his head-set and turned his attention to the egg-shaped affair previously referred to by Stan, connecting it in place of the outdoor antenna. The affair, Stan noticed, was shaped like half an egg, and rotated on a vertical axis at right angles to the normal horizontal line of an egg. Wire was wound on the parabolic wooden frame in such a fashion that the focus of the electrical parabola thus formed was fixed upon a point far out in space, in whatever direction the horizontal axis of the affair might be pointed.

Dick turned back to the set, now much quieter, and motioned for Stan to turn the loop, slowly. Stan stretched a tentative hand toward the handle on top of the parabola, expecting a fearful shriek in the phones. Nothing of the sort occurred—he gave a slight whistle of amazement.

"No body capacity?" he asked.

"Nope," came the reply; "new kink in shielding I worked out." Then as Stan stooped and peered into the frame, a puzzled look on his face: "No need of looking for metallic shields, because there aren't any. Just something I happened to stumble on: reducing everything as much as possible to ground potential."

Stan smiled, and put out his hand.

"I'll have to hand it to you, old kid," he said. "I can supply the practical experience, but you certainly were born with all the brains and genius for both of us."

He began turning the loop slowly, pausing whenever Dick signified for him to do so, and in such a manner that the focus of the parabola moved in a great circle from the south to the east—counter-clockwise, in other words. First a small station in New Mexico, then El Paso, and finally Chicago and New York swung in, loud enough to be just comfortable in the telephones.

The two young men smiled into each other's eyes, contentedly, experiencing the joy of a dream come true and appreciating the beautiful creation on the work bench as only one can appreciate modern wireless telegraphy who has followed the art from its coherer stage. Dick snapped off the tubes, and the two removed their head-sets.

"Some set!" said Dick, the student.

"Some set!" agreed Stan, the good fellow, sensing the coming of one of the friendly arguments, more or less one-sided, which they frequently indulged in. Sure enough, Dick frowned at him (his method of collecting his thoughts) and began:

"This set is appallingly stupid and simple, isn't it?"

"No, it isn't!" snapped back Stan. "It's complicated as the devil."

The fray was on.

"Of course you would disagree," said Dick. "I'd like you less if you failed to. But honestly, now—you understand the principles on which the set works, you know how all the parts are put together, and you know how to operate it efficiently. On the whole, won't you have to admit that this seven-tube set seemed far less complicated to you than did the first crystal set you ever made when you were new to the game?"

"Well, yes, I guess I will," admitted Stan. "As usual, I'm cornered. But just what are you driving at?"

"I'll come to that in a minute. Now, think of the thousands of people in this country who use radio receiving sets. They can tune them, after a fashion; they hear over long distances, mostly because of luck, and

so they think themselves scientific research workers, and speak of their sets, which really do all the work, contemptuously — patronizingly. Yet those same sets, even if they have built them themselves (which is not usually the case) are really miracles to them, if they would only admit it."

"All done?" Stan inquired solicitously.

"All done," said Dick, wonderingly.

"Right. Now listen to this and then unravel it, little logic. It's gospel truth, and I've always wanted an explanation of it—but I never thought I'd meet anyone who would admit everything to be so simple as you do, so I've always kept it under my hat."

"I'm listening," said Dick.

"Before I came to college I had an amateur station in Los Angeles—big spark transmitter and all that. One winter I was listening in at about 1 o'clock in the morning. The stations up here around San Francisco that had been booming in an hour before had all seemed to shut down together, almost as if something had suddenly smothered them, if you get what I mean. The Los Angeles fellows, I suppose, thought that the northern fellows were having some sort of local interference, so they, too, shut down, one by one. 5ZA had been working his spark, down in New Mexico, but he seemed to fade out at about the same time the San Francisco stations did.

"It was odd to hear the air so quiet. I tuned all up and down the scale, hoping for some eastern DX, although it was rather late, but there was not a station on the air. Thinking that perhaps my receiver was not working as it should, I started the rotary gap and drawled out a long CQ on full power, but none of the locals came back to 'bawl me out'—I was alone on the air. It was eery; I felt as if I were the last inhabitant of a dead world, and the night outside—a sixty mile gale of ice-cold north wind had sprung up from nowhere—didn't help to lessen the uncomfortable illusion. Suddenly, on about five hundred meters (I remember the setting of those dials as well as if I had them here in my hands now) I heard a low hum, and eight long dashes pealed out, one after the other, each of them one tone higher than the preceding one. *The octave in the key of C!*

"I admit that I jumped—cold sweat broke out on my forehead, but I glued my fingers to those variometer dials. About a minute later I heard it again—*do, re, mi,* and on up. It sounded at first like eight rotary gaps tuned to a musical scale, except that the tones were much smoother, almost bell-like, in fact."

Dick was laughing.

"And you ask me to explain a thing like that after I've been talking of miracles?" he scoffed. "Why, it's childishly simple. Some local fellow was playing a fool trick with eight rotary gaps adjusted to the key of C, or else someone was pioneering with a modulated CW—a broadcasting set."

"Yeah, Sherlock! Well, I thought of that, too—I'm not as dumb as I look."

Stan had risen to go. When he was safely outside the door, a position calculated to make his parting shot highly dramatic, he turned and shot back, "Right in the middle of that little performance the light in my radio room went out, and I learned the next day that the power had been off all over the city!"

The door slammed.

WEEKS passed. Stan, busy with athletics and activities, did not have time to call at his friend's house for more than a month, and when finally he did, it was only upon receipt of an urgent telephone message. He burst into Dick's room to find that

worthy lying on the floor with his nose deep in an immense volume.

"Oh, Lord! False alarm," he groaned. "I thought you had electrocuted yourself, or something. What's the matter?—and what the dickens are you reading?"

Dick rose and laid the volume carefully on the table.

"A treatise on X-rays," he said; "and as for your other questions, nothing is the matter and I haven't electrocuted myself. I just wanted you to come over and see what you have been responsible for. Look!"

He stepped to the neat work bench and withdrew the black covering cloth from a bulky cabinet.

"If I'm the father of that," snorted Stan, "I ought to be ashamed of myself. Why, it's out of date, obsolete—no one builds cabinets three feet high any more. What in heck is it, anyway?"

"It," said Dick, "is, as I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted"—he coughed, with a dignified air—"something for which you, only you, and no one but you, are responsible."

"How come? I'll bite."

"It's a long story, Stan. You probably remember the trick story that you told me a few weeks ago, at the end of which you left abruptly, so that I might not, with the powers of pure logic, destroy what you seemed to believe a miracle?"

"I remember, all right, only I didn't say it was a miracle, and the story was not a trick story—I told you it was gospel truth, and I wasn't kidding."

"Uh-huh," agreed Dick. "Well, be that as it may, your dramatic exit left me with an unsolved puzzle in my head, as you no doubt intended that it should, and knowing me as you do, old egg-beater, you certainly must know what the result of such a condition upon me would naturally be."

"My gawsh!" Stan exclaimed; "you don't mean to say you've doped out about those musical notes, do you? If you have, I'll surely hand it to—"

"In that case, I'm sorry to confess that I haven't. But look in the cabinet."

STAN looked. He was too used to Dick's queer contrivances to evince surprize; rather he took a careful inventory of what he saw, so that when he turned again to his friend he had a pretty good idea of the contents of the cabinet. He looked up and began enumerating from memory: "Down in a lower compartment there seems to be an orthodox receiving set with eight oversize tubes. All the wiring is oversize, too, and so are the transformers. Up above the set there are a lot of little control appliances, evidently of your own invention, and the biggest X-ray tube I've ever seen, with some sort of a focusing device pointed down into the lower compartment. That's all. What do you think of little Watson's powers of observation, Sherlock?"

"You will insist upon attempting to be humorous, won't you?" rebuked Dick, smiling nevertheless. "Seriously, though, Stan, this is the biggest thing I've ever done, and it may mean more to the world than any other radio experimentation has meant so far. Would you like an idea of what it all means before we start work?"

"I would," from the now sober Stan Ross.

"Well, when you left that night I began turning things over and over in my mind. You quite evidently did not think those eight notes were the result of any human agency, and the idea, though preposterous, fascinated me. Where could such a phenomenon originate, I asked myself, if it had *not* been the prank of some schoolboy? I thought of the millions of other heavenly bodies in the plane of the Galaxy, many of them thousands of

times the size of our Earth, and some undoubtedly inhabited. I thought of Mars, though I knew that there was no more reason to believe it inhabited than any other planet, except that it had been seized upon by the popular fancy because of its proximity to the orbit of the Earth and because of its so-called canals. It was while I was thinking of Mars, however, that my train of thought shot off at a new tangent."

Dick Jarvis paused, utterly forgetful of his friend's presence. His eyes shone queerly. As Ross prompted him he began again:

"Why hadn't we been able to communicate with any of the other planets? Were they so far ahead of us in their development that they had forgotten how to make our foolishly elementary kinds of receiving sets? Was it a mere question of wave lengths? Of distance? Or had our system of radio reception perhaps developed along entirely different lines than theirs? Had they used some principle entirely foreign to the electron theory in their radio work—say some unknown projector ray or light repulsion of the sort which makes the tail of a comet point always away from the sun? It seemed possible, even probable. Then I asked myself what medium of language an exterior planet would use in an attempt at communication, and two things immediately suggested themselves: geometry and music! That latter made me think of you again, so because it was the last thing in my train of thought—you were the last thing, I mean—I decided to call you responsible for the whole works—the receiving set on the bench, which is what you want to hear about, of course. I ought to be ashamed of myself for boring you."

Stan protested.

"Dick," he said, rising and grasping his friend by the hand, "I don't know whether you know it or not, but you're a genius. I'm proud to know you."

Dick Jarvis blushed.

"Thanks, Stan," he said, quietly, and rushed into a hurried discussion of the invention that rested before him, in an attempt to cover his embarrassment. A rare thing, indeed, when in college an athlete deigns to give such praise to one of those who are considered miserable "grinds", though it is indeed true that the grinds usually end up by doing more for the world. All the more credit, then, to that great connecting link of modern America, the radio, which makes all men kin.

"You see, Stanley," Dick continued, "that idea of Martian ray propulsion sort of got me, and I kept asking myself if we didn't have something similar to it here on Earth. There seemed to be something in the back of my head which said we did—a sort of mind-picture of just what I was seeking, yet although I was on the verge of it several times I couldn't seem to quite visualize the thing. Finally I woke up one night with the answer, and the name of the thing on my lips—it was a common X-ray tube. I got up out of bed and started work, and for a month, steadily, I've worked every available minute that I could spare from my studies."

"But—" Stan broke in, impulsively, "why didn't you let me help you? I would have been only too glad—"

"I know you would have been, Stan. You're good about those things. But you will have done more than your share if this thing works, tonight, by just having been here. I may need you for a witness, some day. Now, where was I? Oh, yes—the ray.

"Of course an X-ray tube operates in accordance with the electron theory, but it shoots the electrons off—it doesn't throw them out as an electromagnetic field of force, which is probably the fashion in which our earthly radio waves are propagated. In other

words, although I was still using the electrons in my work, I had an entirely new type of receiving set, and one which, although it might not actually hear messages from another planet, would perhaps be the stepping stone on which some future inventor might build success. So I started.

"In the cabinet on the bench there are, as you noticed, two divisions. One contains an oversize receiving set, with some appliances of my own attached to it, and the other the ray projecting and focusing device. The whole thing is wired with copper tubing, for the simple reason that in my earlier experiments the current developed was sufficient to fuse ordinary wire. The tubes are about the size of fifty watt transmitting tubes, and vary in construction, the one directly beneath the projector, which corresponds to the detector, having five electrodes made of radium-coated quartz. I am not sure that I could explain all of the action, but the radium seems to give off some new emanation that I have never seen before, under the stimulus of the rays from the projector. Do you follow me?"

"I'm trailing," said Stan. "Now tell me about the projector."

"The projector? It's just an unusually large tube similar to an X-ray tube, which I have constructed to withstand extremely high voltages. It produces a tremendous flow of force, which I have named the V-Ray, and which by means of the leaden shield I can direct upon any portion of the net below. Now I believe that with the ray forcing a stream of electrons, or perhaps it would be more correct to say energy, into the tubes, the set will be sensitive to radio waves of a type unknown here on Earth. What the results will be, I do not know. I have never tried the set in its completed form before tonight—I'm just playing a hunch. Ready to go?"

Stan Ross signified his assent, and the two approached the monster on the long work bench. Stan felt a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. Dick attached to the input terminal of the set a long outdoor antenna, which, including the inductances which it contained every fifty feet, contained more than five miles of wire. There were no filaments in the tubes, hence the only batteries needed were some high-voltage blocks, some five hundred volts, altogether. At the extreme right of the panel were two output terminals, across which Dick had temporarily hooked a milliammeter, not knowing whether the output of the set would be auditory, visual, or what. He turned the 110 volts of the lighting system into the step-up transformer connected to the projector tube; the lights blinked, dimmed, and the huge V-Ray tube came to life, glowing greenly. The hum from the transformer seemed to drone a warning, in its ominous sixty-cycle growl—occasionally its safety gap broke down and a viciously snapping tongue of violet flame crashed between the terminals and added its weird glare to the green glow that filled the room.

Dick, looking monstrous in heavy leaden surplice, goggles and gloves, grasped the projector controls and swept the tubes below with the ray. Peering over his shoulder Stan watched the vacuum tubes begin to glow as the V-rays bombarded, with billions of electrons, their radium-coated elements. First a point at the base of each tube became incandescent, grew, and finally resolved itself into a ruddy ball of fire and rolled to the top of the plates, where it exploded and spread over the quartz surfaces as an opal luminescence, turning them into swirling blazes of color—lavender, gold, red. Stan drew back, dizzied and half-hypnotized by the swirling spectra. The tubes seemed

alive. *Alive!* The word drummed through his befogged brain.

Dick adjusted the first tube.

"Equivalent to inductance," he muttered. "I tune the set with it."

The milliammeter quivered slightly, responding to atmospherics, presumably, for there were no stations operating at the time on the wave length to which the set was tuned.

Stan looked at his watch.

"In one minute," he said, "the largest broadcasting station in San Francisco will come on."

The room became deathly quiet save for the hum of the transformer and the ticking of the watch which Stan held in his hand, as the seconds marched their way into eternity. Then—a spurt of flame, and the milliammeter fell to the floor, not alone burned out, but burned almost in half.

The two men stared at each other through their leaden goggles. Stan groped for the telephone on the bench and rang up the broadcasting station.

"Hello, hello," the voice at the other end of the wire answered excitedly, before he had a chance to speak. "The first of a hundred 'phone calls to ask why we're late? No program tonight—all our tubes blew out at once—generator, too—almost as if something suddenly doubled the load on 'em." . . .

The voice ceased as the connection clicked off. Two other broadcasting stations came on simultaneously, as the loud-speaker attached to the set which Dick had placed in operation testified. He looked up to receive Stan's news and, little surprized, turned again to the tuning tube of the V-ray receiver, quickly tuning to the wave-length of the two stations now on the air, while Stan, aware at last of what he was doing, placed a heavy ammeter across the output terminals. The needle on the ammeter dial hesitated for the smallest fraction of a second, then jumped to its maximum position. An instant later the instrument fell to the floor, a smoking ruin.

The two men looked at each other, their eyes bulging.

"No need to telephone those stations," Dick said, his voice shaking. "They'll be burned out, too."

"And *we're doing it!*" whispered Stan. "My God, Dick!—the man said it was as though someone suddenly doubled the load on their generators. That means *wireless transmission of power!*"

Dick stood rigid, then a faint smile touched his lips, as of tension relieved.

"And now," he announced, "we'll go up to a wave-length of one million meters and see what happens to a set of head-phones."

Turning to the set he worked busily for some minutes, adjusting various devices and concentrating the projector ray upon the detector tube directly below it. Stan, too excited now to think of electrocution, stripped off the clumsy gloves and with his bare hands connected two pairs of receivers to the terminals where the two meters had been. With something very like a prayer they placed the telephones over their ears, and Dick adjusted controls until a low, musical hum became audible.

SUDDENLY it seemed to Stan as if thousands of conversations were taking place inside his head. He heard no voices, yet within his brain he was aware of the coming and going of myriad thoughts and ideas not his own. He turned to Dick and started to speak, then realized that it was unnecessary. Dick's mind and his were in perfect tune; they could read each others' thoughts.

"Do you feel what I do, or am I going crazy?" Stan asked.

"Yes. It's true."

"What does it mean? I can't understand."

"It means that we are listening in on interplanetary thought transmis-

sions. I believed that other heavenly bodies conversed by means of geometry or music. I was wrong. I should have known that they would be far enough advanced to use telepathy—radio telepathy."

"These voices that do not seem to be real voices—are they from Mars?"

"Probably they are. Mars is closest to us in the solar system. The Music of the Spheres!"

All this without a word having been spoken. . . .

As the two men listened it seemed that they were actually hearing voices, that the thoughts which the set was pouring into their heads were human voices whispering into their ears. There were conversations of all sorts: plans, plots, love confidences—all that one would expect to hear if he cut in on all the telephone conversations taking place at one time in a big city. For each change of a hundredth part of a wave-length which Dick made with the dials a new flood poured in: discussions of inventions unknown to Earthmen, which might advance them a hundred thousand years—secrets which would revolutionize Earth's every art. And all within the power of two men to disclose!

Of a sudden, growing gradually louder and louder and louder until it dominated all the minor whispers, rose one voice above the others, in the booming tones of a leader of his kind. "Aie! Aie! This is Marlars, chief and war lord over this red planet, which is the lord of all the red planets. I tell of the council to be held even now upon this, the lord of red planets—the council which, according to the legends of our people, has always been held after each hundredth occurrence of the vernal equinox of that small place called Earth by its inhabitants. Press your thought cones to your foreheads in the customary manner, and stay unmoved for one space of time, when I will call you to me. For I am Marlars, lord of this red planet which is the lord of all the red planets."

Dick Jarvis and Stan Ross removed their head-phones and placed them against their foreheads as if mesmerized, and obeying the commands of a stronger will. The hum of the big transformer rose till it became a whine—or was it a shrieking wail? The head-phones, which seemed to be burning into their foreheads, seemed to be changing shape in their very hands. The two felt a tremendous force exerting itself on them—pulling—pulling. . . .

A WEEK or so later Mrs. Sharpe, the landlady of the house in which Dick Jarvis had lived, was terrifiedly answering the questions of two detectives, one sent from the local police station, another from Dick's father.

"S'help me," she was entreating, "that's the truth and nothin' else. I come upstairs, just like what I said, to make the beds, and found a big black box on the table the boys had built beneath the window, with some big lamps inside, a-burnin' and a-snappin'. One of 'em were so big."

She gestured with her hands.

"I turned off the 'lectricity—the boys was always runnin' up big 'lectricity bills on me—but when they didn't come back, and didn't come back, I begun to get scared and fiery mad at 'em at the same time, what with the window busted, and all. I figured they had most likely skipped out to beat me out of the rent, but at the same time I was scared somethin' had happened to 'em. I sold all their stuff to the junkman before Mr. Jarvis got here to claim it, but I'm within my rights, an' I know it. I don't know no more, s'help me."

The two detectives walked together, very slowly, to report. It was a strange case.

WINGS OF POWER

A THREE — PART NOVEL

by Lady Anne Bonny

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

PROFESSOR KURT MAQUARRI, a hunchback son who has been disinherited by his father, the great scientist Maquarri, has discovered a new element, called zodium, which gives him power over the human will. His nephew, Dr. Philip Olivier, the psychanalyst, has inherited the elder Maquarri's papers and the notebooks containing his scientific secrets.

The hunchback has given his stepdaughter, Joan Suffern, a ring, which, unknown to her, contains zodium. He has demonstrated his hypnotic control over Joan by sending out electronic force through his wishing machine, and she is thereby subject to his will so long as she wears the zodium ring. He sends her to Dr. Olivier to kill him by pressing the zodium ring against his neck. Dr. Olivier falls in love with her, but she, in obedience to the wishes of the hunchback at the wishing machine, presses the ring against his neck; a tiny needle darts from it and pours zodium poison into the young doctor's system; and Joan takes the papers and returns in a hypnotic trance to her stepfather, leaving Dr. Olivier apparently dead on the floor of his laboratory.

Dr. Olivier's life is saved by an antidote devised by himself during his own experiments along the same lines as those of Dr. Maquarri. The hunchback, his stepdaughter and his servant Felix, to whom Professor Maquarri has promised Joan, take ship for Joan's native island of Montserrat, where her uncle, Lord Hubert Charing, is about to build a million dollar museum out of a treasure fund obtained by his ancestors from the pirate Blackbeard. The hunchback, through the wishing machine and a zodium-handled magnifying glass that he gives to Lord Hubert, gets him to reveal the hiding place of the treasure. He plans to obtain this, and murder him as he has murdered Joan's mother, by zodium poisoning, which leaves no trace.

10

IT WAS three weeks since Dr. Philip Olivier had met with the strange accident in his laboratory, and he was not yet himself, but he had insisted on picking up the threads of his work. There were still several grams of zodium in the Crookes tube on his table, and he wished to examine it. In the long torment of his enforced rest in bed, Dr. Olivier had exhausted his theories concerning Joan and the attempted murder. His heart was heavy, and old habit alone made him go once more to the laboratory table that had formerly centered his interest.

Now, as he held the tube in his hand and studied its contents, a strange nebulous vision came to him. It was Joan he saw—Joan whom he could never dismiss from his mind or heart—but he saw her as he had never known her in reality: a struggling, eager Joan, fighting some strange

force that held her, but most curious of all, Joan in a tropical setting. He distinctly saw her against a background of palm fronds!

Wearily the young doctor laid down the Crookes tube. What was the good of all these speculations? The girl had tried to murder him; that was plain. She had pretended to an interest in his secrets and formulæ only in order to obtain possession of the deadly zodium, when all the while he had thought her innocent and in distress. But still, how could she have grasped those intricate technicalities? It needed the trained intellect of a scientist, and she was a young wisp of a girl. He groaned as there flooded over him the torturing tenderness of those moments when he had held that slim figure in his arms.

Christopher C. Quinn was a welcome interruption when he found Dr. Olivier in his laboratory. True to his promise to Dr. Graetz, remorseful over the relapse which had almost cost his young friend his life, the Irishman had said nothing to Olivier concerning the mystery since that day three weeks before.

But he had not been idle meanwhile, and now as he noted that his friend was, although weak, still well on the road to recovery, he made up his mind to thrash the thing out.

"Look here, Phil!" he cried impetuously; "we may as well be frank with each other now as later. I happen to know that your strange lady of mystery—Miss X-Y—tried to murder you, and I'm on her trail, but I need your help—"

Olivier bent forward eagerly, interrupting him.

"You're on her trail? You mean you know where she is?"

Then he remembered, and sank back in his chair before the fire.

"What I want to know," Quinn continued, "is what motive she could have had?"

He looked keenly at his friend.

"You're so damned good-looking, Phil, and such a young demigod where the ladies are concerned; could it have been that she was in love with you, and insanely furious that her love brought no response?"

Olivier flinched, but he knew the remorseless character of his friend when the Sherlock Holmes side of him was uppermost.

"My God!" he groaned. "Don't! She needn't have been furious, for I loved her, and told her so. That day when she seemed herself for the first time, I lost my control and made love to her."

He dropped his head and the low tones were bitterly sad.

"She pretended to return that love."

Quinn whistled.

"That changes things entirely, Phil. Either we must prove that she is evil altogether, or else rescue her from the evil forces that use her as a pawn!"

Olivier leaned forward eagerly.

"You mean—you actually mean that you think she was unduly influenced? Yes! It's possible. She had some of the marks of the hypnotic subject, and yet—"

He shook his head in bafflement.

"Other marks of behavior absolutely contradicted that theory."

He clenched his fists.

"God! I'd give my life to know that she wasn't herself when she tried to do for me!"

For a second neither man spoke. Both were lost in thought. Suddenly, however, an idea darted into the doctor's mind. He got up and crossed to the cabinet safe that stood against the wall. For the first time in three weeks, he thought of his secret formulæ. The empty compartment in the open safe convinced him. The notebooks, the secret formulæ, were gone. Suddenly he remembered. They had been out on the table—for Joan to examine—on the day she stabbed him! Quinn's eyes met his meaningly.

"It's plain she stole your formulæ, Phil," cried Quinn, "but how could she have put her hands on the zodium that poisoned you? Surely you alone have succeeded in separating that element!"

Olivier's brain whirled. High up on the laboratory shelf stood the precious phial containing his own infinitesimal supply of the stuff, and his fingers trembled as he reached for it.

He and Quinn measured it out at the laboratory table. It was all there, the exact weight! Quinn held one of the pans of the fine scales in his hands as Olivier carefully tipped the mercurial substance from the other pan back into the phial.

"Why, I wonder, should her chauffeur have taken orders from an unknown hunchback," murmured Olivier, baffled.

Quinn threw him a startled look.

"Phil!" he cried. "How did you happen to say that?"

"Say what? Oh, I don't know—the words just came into my head."

"But I was thinking those exact words when you said them—when you repeated them literally word for word!"

His gaze held the younger man in its intensity.

"My God! Phil! How did you know there was an unknown hunchback in the case? I haven't told you, and I alone know!"

Olivier's astonishment matched his own.

"It's true! This is the first time in three weeks we've even touched on the subject! Well, it's a curious coincidence, but perhaps there is something in this mental telepathy, you know. I've always been open to conviction on that score. Still—since we are on the subject—I can't associate that girl with anything ugly and sinister like an organized gang of criminals!"

Quinn's mouth gaped.

"God in heaven, Phil! This is too much! You took the very words out of my mouth!"

"Hm!"

Olivier was white with excitement.

"Coincidences like that never happen in succession. The law of averages is against it."

OLIVIER laid down the precious phial and walked thoughtfully up and down the room. Quinn, still standing by the laboratory table, one pan of the scales in his hand, called out to him after a few seconds.

"Hurry up, Phil, take the rest of this precious stuff. I'm afraid I may spill it."

As Olivier measured the rest of the zodium, he said musingly, "The thing for us to do is to find out who else might have a supply of zodium, and what was his connection with her."

"Phil! This is the third time!"

The Irishman spluttered in his eagerness.

"I was thinking that myself when you said it—word for word, as before! You were never a good detective, my boy, so my thought must have been transferred to you—"

"My God!" Olivier interrupted. "What an utter blind fool I've been! Of course! Zodium is hypnotic in its power! It must be! It's only when we are both in contact with the element that we influence each other's thought!"

He writhed.

"Why, oh, why, did I not discover it sooner?"

"What do you mean—sooner?"

"And the girl was hypnotized by some one who wanted for his own reasons to murder me and gain possession of my secrets! But who—who could it have been that—"

"Ah, my dear chap," said Quinn, in his suave, Sherlock Holmes manner, "there I have preceded you. When you were at the point of death, I promised not to question you about

the girl, but it was plain the formulæ had been desired for some purpose, and the murder instigated to get you out of the way.

"I wrote to old Professor Bertelli, at Pisa, because I thought that as one of the executors of your grandfather's unusual trust, he might be expected to know, and I asked him who besides yourself might have known of your grandfather's secret theories, in the first place, and, in the second, who might have been desirous of gaining possession of them. This cable came a week ago."

The cable which Quinn handed to his friend was brief:

WRITING FULLY S. S.
DANTE ALIGHIERI
LEAVING NAPLES TODAY

"Hm! The *Dante Alighieri* arrived at 6 o'clock this morning. The letter should come in today's last mail, and unless I am mistaken, there is the postman's ring at the door."

It was true, for in a few seconds old Mme. Franchard came in with the mail. Olivier's trembling hands seized the letter, which bore an Italian postmark. Together the two men read:

My Dear Dr. Olivier:

Your friend, Signor Christopher Columbus Quinn, has asked me to write you concerning any personage who might have known of the existence of your late respected grandfather's scientific secrets. Only one such person comes to my mind.

There was a son, you know, by a later marriage, one Kurt Maquarri. He had an extraordinarily brilliant intellect, but the boy's mind was perverted, and it was this fact that decided the late Dr. Maquarri to make you his scientific heir.

The last I heard of Professor Maquarri, he was an entomologist of some note, living in the West Indies.

I am, sir,
Your most obedient servant,
GUGLIELMO BERTELLI.

"Then this Professor Maquarri was the hunchback, certainly!" cried Quinn.

"The West Indies, the West Indies," Olivier murmured. "It is as I have imagined her—in some tropical setting—"

He stopped, startled.

"I got the picture distinctly, but only when I was working with the zodium—before you came in. It explains our theory! Strengthens it! Yes, and that day I—I held her in my arms, she said she had not been so happy since she left—God! the name escapes me! But it had a foreign sound."

"Let's get a map of the West Indies, then," cried Quinn.

Together the two men bent over the atlas. The West Indies! Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti—St. Thomas, St. Croix, Antigua—no! that was not the name—ah! Montserrat!

Olivier tapped the book excitedly.

"Montserrat! That's the name! One of the Leeward Islands in the West Indies! That day—she said she had not been so happy since she left Montserrat!"

Then he turned to Quinn.

"I need you in this, Chris. I love that girl, and now that we know of Professor Maquarri's existence, and the hypnotic power of the zodium rays, all my old faith and hope have returned! I must save her! Could you—could you go with me to Montserrat?"

"Go with you? Of course, my boy! You couldn't keep me away! The thing is too interesting, too baffling. I could go with you at any time. When is the next sailing?"

"Hm, good!" said Quinn, after a perusal of the sailing list in the newspaper. "Three days from now. That will just give me time to arrange a few matters of importance before we leave, and meanwhile, Phil, try to pull yourself together. You'll probably need all your wits with you once we get to Montserrat."

11

THE owner of the Eagle Press Clipping Bureau had helped Christopher C. Quinn before, and it was a shrewd move on the Irishman's part to go directly to him next morning. Amateur scientists were usually egotists, he reasoned, and egotists garnered accounts of themselves in the press. Ten chances to one, Professor Kurt Maquarri had been a subscriber to a press clipping bureau, and since the Eagle Press Clipping Bureau was the only one with a competent international service, he would try that first.

Yes, he had been correct in his guess. Maquarri had been a subscriber for the past ten years. But the address to which the clippings were sent had during all that time remained the same. It was a postoffice box at the central branch in New York. There was no clue to be traced in that direction, then. But the tracing of clues was not what had sent Quinn to the bureau.

"This man Maquarri is a crook and a villain out of an old time melodrama, Lamson, or I am much mistaken," said Quinn, leaning forward eagerly across his friend's desk in the latter's private office. "I have almost positive proof that he has used an accomplice to attempt the murder of my best friend, Dr. Philip Olivier, and we are both off to Montserrat to gather further evidence on the next boat."

Quinn looked at Edgar Lamson speculatively. Never before had he asked him deliberately to falsify a record, but he would risk it now.

"Dr. Olivier, as you may know, is the grandson of the famous Dr. Philip Maquarri, of Florence, Italy. He is, therefore, a half nephew of Professor Kurt Maquarri. If the newspaper account of Dr. Olivier's death should mention him as Dr. Philip Maquarri Olivier, which is his full name, it would be perfectly natural for you to mark the name Maquarri with a blue pencil and send the clipping to the professor, eh?"

Lamson nodded. He grasped the lawyer's meaning, but he hesitated. His business was an old and reliable one, but still—Christopher C. Quinn was on the side of law and order, engaged in hunting down a criminal, and he had never known Christopher C. Quinn to exaggerate.

"We shall, of course, pay for the cost of printing the notices," continued Quinn, "and we shall have some half dozen copies run off. You can send two, dutifully blue-penciled, to the professor at Montserrat, keep two for your files, and let us have the other two in case we should need them at some future time."

Quinn pulled out of his pocket the draft of the notice he had already written, and handed it to Lamson.

When he left the office, half an hour later, everything was arranged. A rush order had gone to the printer, and the short obituary notice would be run through that day. Lamson, contrary to custom, promised to attend to the cutting and pasting of the faked notices, and to blue-penciling and mailing them for the same boat on which Olivier and Quinn would sail in two days' time to Montserrat. Then, with Maquarri satisfied that his schemes had succeeded, they could, with a slight disguise, move about on the small island and find out what they wanted.

TEN days later, when the *Amazonia* docked at Plymouth, in the island of Montserrat, Christopher C. Quinn walked down the gang-plank, supporting a tall, elderly gentleman with gray hair and a surprizingly young face, in spite of his invalid's cane. Mr. Oliver Phillips, as he had been known on board ship, bore little trace of Philip Olivier in his appearance. Quinn, skilled in such matters, had seen to his disguise.

That afternoon, the day's post was delivered at the Charing plantation house nine miles out of Plymouth, and Felix carried the letters to Professor Maquarri, at work as usual in his study.

Professor Maquarri was not a man of many affairs. The secret, devious courses of his life precluded all but the few necessary contacts, and the post was never an exciting event in his day. He languidly glanced over the few business letters, forwarded from his post-office box in New York City, and singled out the one envelope bearing the words "Eagle Press Clipping Bureau" in its upper corner. His notices in the press were meager enough, but he was always delighted when he saw his name in print, and so he had continued for years to subscribe to the service. For years he had been known as an entomologist of some achievement, and so there had been a constant trickle of news in the papers—dry, dull stuff, read only by fellow entomologists, probably.

Professor Maquarri started gleefully, however, as he called Felix's attention to the blue-penciled notice in his hand. There it ran, the notice of his rival's death.

September 2, 1923—After an illness of three weeks, Dr. Philip *Maquarri* Olivier, grandson of the late Dr. Philip *Maquarri*, of Florence, Italy, died at his home here today. Death was due to an accident which occurred in Dr. Olivier's laboratory while he was conducting an important scientific experiment.

"Good!" muttered Maquarri. "It is well we have made sure. Now we shall be able to use the same methods on Lord Hubert without fear."

"What if it should not kill him promptly?" asked Felix. "What if he, too, should linger on for three weeks, as the young American doctor did?"

"Hm! I have thought of that myself. We will make the dose doubly strong, that is all."

"When shall it be, then, Maestro?"

"Soon, very soon now. Only the fact that Lord Hubert prolonged his stay at St. John's with his architect has delayed me. He is due back in three days' time, and then we shall find out the treasure's hiding place. After that, it only remains for us to closet the girl with him, as usual, and take our place at the wishing machine."

In the three days time that had elapsed since Quinn and Olivier had come to the island of Montserrat, little had happened. Quinn, representing himself as an amateur scientist, interested in entomology, had called on Lord Hubert, only to find that the latter was in St. John's, Antigua, with his niece and secretary, Miss Suffern, and that they were expected back before the end of the week.

Olivier, however, gloated over the news. Joan was still alive and well, apparently, or she could not have gone on the trip with her uncle. The boat from St. John's was due late of a Thursday afternoon, and though Quinn argued and pleaded with him, he was determined to wait on the dock and see Joan as she came on shore.

"I promise to make no sign, and she will never recognize me," said Olivier, and Quinn had to be content with that.

The lights on the quay were already lighted on that rainy, blustery afternoon in mid-September, as Christopher C. Quinn and Dr. Olivier paced up and down. Out in the harbor, the winking lights of the ship came gradually nearer.

As the two men waited, Quinn with his hat pulled well down over his eyes, and Olivier in his gray wig and habitual disguise, an old-fashioned carriage rattled down the street toward the quay. Lord Hubert was notoriously old-fashioned and penurious. Grudging the expense of repairing the roads leading to his plantation, he had never

purchased a motor car, and the lumbering carriage which his father had used still served his needs. The carriage stopped at the quay, and Professor Kurt Maquarri alighted.

Quinn pulled Olivier with him back into the shadow of a stack of boxes, as Professor Maquarri passed within a few feet of them. Yes, it was undoubtedly the man they were looking for, the bearded hunchback who had stolen Olivier's secrets and tried to instigate his murder, but this was not the moment to strike.

The boat was docking by now, and in a few minutes the gang-plank was lowered and the passengers began to straggle off. Olivier clutched his friend's arm as he caught sight of Joan, talking to her maid, followed by a tall, striking Englishman who must have been Lord Charing, her uncle. He started forward as if to call her, forgetful of his promise to Quinn, but the latter threw him a warning growl as Professor Maquarri stepped forward unctuously to welcome his host back to the island.

"I must see her at once," muttered Olivier, as the old carriage clattered away down the street toward the road winding along the sea to the plantation. "I must get a message to her tonight, or tomorrow at latest."

He looked doubtfully at the stormy sky, which showed no signs of abating its steady downpour.

"If only I can warn her to fight against the hypnotic power which Maquarri exerts over her—if only I can make her realize that she is hypnotized—then she will be safe enough until we can tighten the net around the villain!"

"It's madness, utter madness, Phil!"

Quinn, all Sherlock Holmes for the moment, realized that he had to do with the impulses of a man deeply in love, and he trembled lest something should rent the net he was gathering around Professor Maquarri. But, as Olivier insisted, he gave in.

"Wait here, then, in the shadow of these boxes, while I reconnoiter."

Christopher C. Quinn pretended to be looking impatiently down the street leading to the quay, as if he expected a conveyance to meet him, as Lord Hubert's party climbed into his carriage.

"Oh, uncle!" cried Joan; "Susan must stop at the chemist's shop to have a prescription filled for me. We used the last of my sleeping medicine two nights ago, and I shall go mad if I lie awake tonight!"

"Very well," said Lord Hubert impatiently; "let her ride out in the station wagon with Pedro and the baggage, then. We must be getting on ourselves at once."

Quinn just waited to see the party finally packed into the coach before he turned back to Olivier.

"It's the girl's maid, Susan, who seems devoted. She's to stay behind and wait for a prescription at the chemist's, and you can give her a note for her mistress if you waylay her there."

The two men followed the coach at a good distance down the street leading from the quay. It stopped before a chemist's shop and then lumbered on, leaving Susan behind. Quinn walked a little more quickly as the carriage increased the distance between them.

"I found out this afternoon, Phil," said Quinn, "that Maquarri spends a good many nights in the town of Plymouth. Pedro, the overlooker on Lord Charing's estate, gave me the information. I was questioning him discreetly, but he seemed almost eager to speak against the professor and his master as well—evidently thinks they're both cut out of the same cloth, and he has a grudge against the species. Pedro doesn't know where he stays yet, but I've an idea he has reasons of his own for wanting to find out. *Cherchez la femme*, perhaps. At any rate, it's my theory that if we can track him to his lair, we shall be

able to find the evidence on which to take out a warrant for his arrest—"

"You mean," interrupted Olivier, "you mean he keeps the secret formulæ there—wherever it is—and his own supply of zodium?"

"It's an idea that came to me this morning, Phil, when I saw him in the town. Pedro's story strengthened my theory. Then just now I overheard Professor Maquarri tell Lord Charing that he had important business in town to attend to and could not dine at the plantation, but he would ride out later."

"Tonight?"

"Evidently. So I shall just leave you here to transact your business with the maid when she comes out of the chemist's shop, and I shall follow that carriage when it turns the corner at the end of the street."

OLIVIER watched Christopher C. Quinn as he shortened the distance between himself and the carriage. Then, when both had turned the corner, he took up his stand outside the chemist's and waited for Susan to emerge.

He started forward as the cloaked figure of the Scotchwoman appeared in the doorway. His manner was all ingratiating courtesy as he prepared to speak to the woman, but when she spied him, Susan gave a start of recognition.

"Yes, yes, I know, sir," she interrupted, after Olivier's first few words. "I recognized you at once from the picture in the magazine Miss Joan had. You're the doctor she went to in New York—who seemed to do her some good for a time—"

"And I'm here to do her more good!" cried Olivier. "If only you will help me! Listen, I've reason to think you don't trust Professor Maquarri any more than I do, so I'll tell you a secret. He has hypnotized Miss Suffern time and again and made her carry out his bidding—"

"Hypnotized her!"

Susan almost dropped her precious bottle of medicine. She could scarcely contain her indignation.

"Yes, it must be true! She acted so queer, so almost daft, at times!"

"Well, then," continued Olivier, "I must see her, and at once. Tonight. I must warn her to use all her forces, all her power of strength and will to resist that outside influence. I can help her, of course, but the real fight is in her own hands, and I must warn her."

Susan nodded, her practical Scotch mind already finding a way.

"There's a lime grove hard by the house, sir, where you can wait."

She considered for a minute.

"She and her uncle work at night on his book—in the library. Write her a note, sir, which I will see that she gets before dinner tonight, and tell her you'll give her some signal while she is at work with her uncle, so she can come out to the grove to see you."

Olivier had started to scribble his note before Susan had finished speaking.

"There are plenty of moths fluttering about the lighted windows at night down in this country, aren't there?"

Susan nodded, not comprehending.

"But they almost never get through the peculiarly constructed tropical shutters, eh?"

"No, sir. There are plenty of them in the garden and outside the windows, though."

"Good!"

Olivier bent once more over his note, and then handed it to Susan to read.

"Joan dearest," the note ran, "Susan will tell you of meeting me. I have come to Montserrat especially to help you. When I flutter a white moth through the blinds of the library tonight, meet me in the lime grove outside. Until then, and always, Phil."

Pedro, driving the station wagon, piled with bags, drew up at the door of the shop, and Susan climbed in.

The wagon clattered off, leaving the young doctor to his own devices for several hours.

An inquiry at his hotel satisfied him that Quinn had not returned from trailing Maquarri, and Olivier wandered out on the streets of the town to satisfy his impatience until the hour when Susan had told him to ride out to the plantation.

The rain had ceased by now, and a sharp wind blew black scudding clouds, somehow strangely menacing, across the indigo blue of the tropical night and the face of the moon. Olivier found himself on the outskirts of the town, following a path that led along the cliffs by the sea. As the wind gained, the booming of the surf against the rocks drowned out all other sounds, and Olivier stood there for a long time, following his own thoughts, before he turned back.

His path led past a small hamlet of native shacks, and in one house at the edge of the group, unmindful of him, Professor Maquarri and Felix d'Acosta were closeted together. The wishing machine stood rigged up on a table in the center of the small hurricane cellar where the two men talked.

"Tonight, Felix, I shall ride out to the plantation after dinner and beg Lord Hubert, as a special favor, to give me the final data for my monograph on the Yucca moth. While I am with him, in his study, you shall stay here at the machine to influence him to disclose to me finally and exactly the suspected hiding place of the treasure."

Felix nodded, and the hunchback continued:

"Tomorrow morning, then, you take the boat for St. John's as arranged, ostensibly to carry my proofs to the printer there, you understand, but really to have you out of the way, in case suspicion points to us later. Tomorrow, during the day, while you are gone, I mean to strike! We have waited too long as it is."

Felix's eyes questioned his master, and Maquarri smiled.

"Lord Hubert is a man of great influence in the West Indies, as you know. You may be sure both you and I will come in for some questioning after his death. Therefore, if it is known that you are in St. John's on the day of the murder, and if I am seen just before and just after the hour at certain shops in Plymouth—as I shall take good care that I shall be seen—they will never dare to suspect so good an alibi. Lord Hubert's death will be mysterious, perhaps, but they will soon give it up."

12

ON THAT same evening, after dinner, Joan Suffern sat alone in the library. Her eyes shone, and her whole attitude was one of eager expectancy as she glanced first at the door and then at the window, shuttered as usual against the tropical night.

Out of the front of her dress Joan pulled Olivier's short note, and scanned it eagerly again. When a white moth fluttered through the shutters! She could scarcely wait for the moment to come, and bent forward eagerly, as if to hasten her lover's coming by sheer force of will. A noise outside warned her, and she had barely time to stuff the note inside her bodice before Lord Hubert, armed for the evening's work, appeared in the doorway.

Joan knew her uncle's fanatical temper in regard to his work, but still she hoped to circumvent it. She started to plead a headache, but other people's pain was never a reality to Lord Hubert, self-centered and egotistical, and he brushed aside the girl's excuses. Joan was in despair, one eye forever seeking the window, but the signal had not come as yet, and she trusted to her wits to escape when it did come.

Olivier was a strange figure, and certainly not one that Joan would have expected to see as he crept cautiously toward the library window. At the last moment he had decided to cling to the gray wig of his disguise, in case anyone should run into him in the dark garden, and he had put on the military uniform and cape which Quinn had procured that day for his own disguise.

Following Susan's directions, Olivier marked the library window through which he meant to flutter his strange signal. Cautiously he crept up, hand over hand, and raised himself by means of the stout vines that framed the window. The shutters were closed, as usual, but through the narrow slits of the blinds he could make out Joan, bending over the table beside her uncle.

At the same moment Joan, feeling his presence outside, looked up. A great white moth fluttered through the blind, and flapped about the room, whirring against the ceiling, darting in zigzag lines at the lamp on the table.

As Olivier let himself carefully down and started across the moonlit lawn toward the lime grove, he stepped behind a large bush as the sound of wheels on the gravel road close by reached his ears. One second sooner, and he would have been discovered. He caught his breath as he saw the bearded hunchback lolling back in the open carriage, but evidently the man had not spied him, for the carriage went on, and soon the hunchback had mounted the steps of the house.

Joan's second plea of the headache had had little effect on her uncle, and she was just about to consider open rebellion when Professor Maquarri was ushered in.

"Ah, my good friend," he began unctuously to Lord Hubert, "a thousand pardons for disturbing you tonight, but I am sending Felix over to St. John's in the morning with my manuscript for the printer, and I found myself snagged on a few points. I rode out here hoping you would be good enough to look at my specimens again in your study, and perhaps clear up my difficulty."

Lord Hubert was on his feet in a moment, his vanity and egotism caressed by Maquarri's deferring to him on a special subject, and Joan breathed a sigh of relief. The two men were scarcely out of the room before she sped across to the library window. No, he was not there. He would be waiting outside in the lime grove.

The young trees in the lime grove, scarcely larger than good-sized shrubs, grew within three or four feet of each other, their thick, glossy foliage forming an effective screen from the sight of anyone outside the grove. Fearing to frighten Joan, Olivier had taken off his gray wig, throwing it on the ground with his cape and wide-brimmed hat, as he heard her coming. She rounded one of the small trees and stopped almost beside him. For a long moment they looked at each other, the memory of the weeks of separation in their eyes. Then, without a word, Joan was in his arms. He did not even caress her at first. It was heaven enough to be there, close to her, to hold her against him, to feel her heart beat. Safe with him at last!

Then he started to kiss her, softly, gently, at first, but as his pent-up longing found expression, he drew her closer. Round about them stood the sturdy little lime trees. Against the waxy, dark green foliage on the thorny branches, the little golden nuggets, not yet ripe enough to fall, gleamed. On the grass at their feet lay the deep golden limes that had already dropped from the branches.

After a little while they began to talk. Joan asked the meaning of Olivier's uniform, and with the question the magic world of love retreated

and he remembered the purpose of their meeting.

Strange, he thought, that she had said no word about his illness, about stabbing him back there in his laboratory. Well, she had never known she did it, then. He was glad it had been as he suspected. What form of hypnotism her stepfather had used on her he could not tell, but he would be happy if she never knew how close she had come to murdering him.

"Listen, Joan," he said, "I am in disguise because I am trying to find evidence against your stepfather, Professor Maquarri."

Joan started in terror, but his smile reassured her.

"I have discovered what it was that troubled you—that baffled us both—about your mental illness in New York. Your stepfather has been hypnotizing you!"

"No, no, no! I will not have it!" cried Joan. "It isn't possible!"

"You are right," answered Olivier firmly. "It isn't possible now that you know. Now that you are warned, when you feel his influence, you must fight it. Simply fight it back, that is all."

"Oh, but I am afraid," Joan whimpered, huddling back against the tree. "I have always feared him, but this—this I cannot stand!"

"Be brave, my darling," urged Olivier. "So much depends on your bravery during the next twenty-four hours. Quinn and I are ready to tighten the net. Another day, if we are lucky, will see the evidence against him in our hands, and then will come the warrant for his arrest."

"But tonight! Tonight—tonight I cannot stand—", stammered Joan, holding her head distractedly.

"Listen to me, darling. Do you think I would leave you here if there were any danger? I happen to know that Professor Maquarri is going back to Plymouth tonight. Quinn found it out earlier in the day. Well, we must simply trace him to the place in Plymouth where he hides, and the rest is merely a matter of taking out a warrant for his arrest, or I am much mistaken."

Joan listened dazedly as he explained the situation. She was still afraid, but she tried to summon the courage her lover demanded of her.

"Let us go nearer the edge of the grove," she whispered, "where we can watch the windows of Uncle Hubert's study. When the lights go out there it will mean that he—that my stepfather—is leaving. Then it will be time for you to start ahead of him and find Pedro with your waiting horse."

SOME time later as Olivier rode down the long road to Plymouth, lined with tall coconut palms, he heard the faint crunching of the wheels of Maquarri's carriage behind him. He decided to keep on at the same pace for a while and let the professor gain gradually on him. Sooner or later he would have to pass him on the road, and then he could follow and find out his hiding place in the town.

For several miles things went on in this manner, the hunchback's carriage gradually shortening the distance between him and the gray-haired officer on horseback. Suddenly, however, it occurred to Maquarri that although the man on horseback had not once looked back, he was nevertheless measuring his pace to keep with the slower pace of the vehicle behind him. Was the man a thug, who would turn at the right moment, at the loneliest part of the road, and gallop back to attack him? Or could it be that one of the government officers was on his trail?

They were within a quarter of a mile of the town, and the road took a diagonal turn before following the cliffs and the sea. Maquarri was just trying to make up his mind about the horseman in front of him when another rider rounded the turn of the

road. He pulled up short, in surprize, and evidently greeted the officer, for he wheeled his horse about and both men followed the road to Plymouth.

Maquarri was not sure, of course, but his plans were too near fruition for him to take any chances. He leaned forward cautiously and spoke in a low voice to his driver.

"I shall just get out here," he said, "and take a short cut across the fields to my home."

He eyed the man shrewdly, slipping a silver coin into his hand.

"If those men ahead there question you as to when I left the carriage, you must pretend to be surprized yourself that I am no longer there."

And springing down agilely from the steps of the carriage as it kept on its slow way, Maquarri had in a few seconds disappeared beyond the screen of the tall trees and was creeping in a crouched position through the cane fields.

Olivier turned suddenly in his saddle as he detected a slight change in the rate at which the carriage followed him. He called out to Quinn, and both riders plunged from the road across the cane fields. A moving black spot off there among the cane gave them their direction, and the chase began. Maquarri, who could dodge in and out among the cane, had the better of them from the first, for he doubled on his tracks and lay down flat in the cane for a few minutes. Then he would wriggle his way to another vantage point, and start doubling back toward the town. Quinn, who saw that the man on foot had the advantage over them, jumped from his horse and plunged through the cane.

Maquarri turned as he found that the younger man was gaining on him. Olivier, who had galloped on ahead, on a false clue, had wheeled about now, and seeing Quinn's riderless horse, he had himself dismounted, and started off after the two men. Maquarri pulled out his pistol as his adversaries closed in on him. There was a flash and a report, and Quinn fell. Olivier dared not go to him at the moment, but crashed after the hunchback.

Quinn's horse galloped up, badly frightened, and as Olivier's shot rang out, just missing the dodging hunchback, the latter grasped the horse's bridle and swung himself up into the saddle. A sharp lash with the reins, and the horse started like lightning across the cane fields. Olivier's own horse was nowhere to be seen, and it was hopeless to try to pursue the man on foot. By the irony of circumstance, where the horse had been practically useless in tracking down the dodging man among the cane, he gave Maquarri, trying to escape, an unlimited advantage over the others.

Olivier, realizing himself beaten for the moment, turned to Quinn, who lay groaning where Maquarri's bullet had sprawled him.

"It's nothing, a hole in the leg, that's all," Quinn reassured him, "but the worst of it is that devil's escaped again."

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As Olivier sat beside his friend's bed late that night, a dull booming roar came from the surf on the cliffs near the town. He looked out of the window. The moon was completely hidden, and menacing black clouds raced across the sky. He awoke several times during the night, and each time he heard the heavy booming of the surf.

Next morning Quinn was so much better that he raged at Olivier for keeping him in bed.

"See here, Chris!" the young doctor cried; "you'll have to give me your promise, and that's final. I don't leave you unless you do, and I must get out to the plantation as early as possible and bring Joan back here. I don't know what that devil of a stepfather will do now that he knows we are on his trail."

Quinn had just yielded to the doctor's insistence when there came a knock at the door. Olivier opened it to find Pedro, overlooker on Lord Hubert's estate, standing behind the bellboy.

"I've an urgent message for you, sir, from Miss Joan," he said, as Olivier motioned him into the room and shut the door.

"Last night, sir, after I'd given you your horse, Miss Joan went to Susan Forsythe — the Scotchwoman, you know—and told her you were trying to find out where Professor Maquarri went when he stayed the night in Plymouth. She said the arrest of her stepfather today depended on your finding that out, so Susan thought of me. Maquarri never paid any attention to me, but the quadroon, Mariquita, and I have had dealings, and I had reason to watch her. I shadowed her one night, and saw the professor come out of her house. He reproached her for not returning earlier, and acted like he was a regular visitor to the house, so when I told all this to Susan, she and Miss Joan sent me off here in a great hurry and bade me tell the same story to you."

Olivier and Quinn were plainly excited.

"Could you take me to that house now? Immediately?" cried Olivier.

"It would have to be right away, sir. The professor has gone to the dock to see Mr. Felix off to St. John's, and I passed the woman, Mariquita, just now on her way to market. It will be an hour before the professor returns, and it will take Mariquita as long to fill her market basket, but we had best be off at once, sir."

As Olivier made his way down Parliament Street with the overlooker, his hopes beat high. He would go immediately to the governor of the island and lay his case before him. Then would come the warrant for Maquarri's arrest, and Joan would be finally safe. That afternoon, or evening at the latest, he could ride out to her with the news.

"Hey there, Pedro, is the boat sailing for St. John's this morning, do you know?" sang out a shopkeeper, standing in his doorway.

"Yes, I think so. Why shouldn't it? Just because the barometer is a bit low? We've had these hurricane scares before, you know."

"Yes, but this time the barometer's down to 30.03, and the wind hasn't shifted. If it falls to four tenths and the wind doesn't change, we'll be in the direct path of a hurricane before afternoon, you'll see."

Pedro laughed as he turned to Olivier.

"He's the joke of the island, sir. Richest merchant in town, and always in dread of the hurricane. Nobody pays any attention to him any more. We're always having close scares this time of the year."

In a few minutes the two men had reached the cottage at the edge of the small hamlet which Olivier had passed the night before. Pedro, who seemed to know the place well, took Olivier around to the rear door and inserted a key in the lock. He gave no explanation of how he had come by that key, and Olivier, who could form his own conclusions, asked no questions. Pedro kept watch outside while Olivier quickly padded about through the three small rooms of the cottage. He was looking for a place where his formulæ and the supply of zodium might be, but there was no trace of them.

"Pedro, Pedro," he called softly, "the door to the hurricane cellar is locked. Have you a key to it, by any chance?"

Pedro shook his head. Well, never mind, thought Olivier. If the cellar door was locked, it was evidently for a reason. People did not usually lock the door to the one refuge in case the dreaded hurricane took them by surprize. He would risk it. He would swear out a warrant of arrest on the

chance that that cellar contained evidence against Professor Maquarri.

But Pedro was calling to him from the door.

"There goes the boat to St. John's, sir. We'd better clear out of here at once, for the professor may come back any moment now."

Dr. Olivier lost no time in seeking an interview with the governor of the island. The great house that stood at the end of Parliament Street, near the fort, was reached in half an hour, but he had to wait. The governor was busy, and there seemed to be a distinct tension in the air. As Olivier waited in the reception room, he looked out of the French windows. The sky and the sea were the same dull leaden hue, and there were menacing black clouds low on the horizon. The dull roar of the surf could be heard in the town. Along Parliament Street, people bent low as they made their way against the sharp wind, which whipped their garments about them and sent pieces of paper and scraps of debris flying down the street.

While Olivier waited to see the governor, Professor Maquarri made his way toward the cottage of Mariquita. The woman had just returned with her market basket, and he found her outside the door, gossiping with a neighbor. Both were looking anxiously up at the sky, but the hunchback, intent on his own problems, cut across to the path by the cliffs and entered by the rear door, avoiding notice according to his usual custom.

He had decided not to wait until afternoon to carry out his plan. Joan and her uncle would be hard at work in the latter's study now, as they were every morning, and he would take his place at the wishing machine at once. He lit the candle in the hurricane cellar, and crouched over his machine. Yes, he had taken the fool Felix in completely. While he was out of the way, he would have Joan first stab her uncle and then turn the needle against herself.

The girl was resisting his power more and more each day. Some day she would be useless to serve his ends, and so long as she lived there would always be the danger of her remembering the uses to which she had been put. No, she must die, and if the fool Felix made any trouble about not possessing her, he could threaten him into silence.

Years of study, of effort, of brooding on his own ruthless plans had given the hunchback a fiendish, superhuman power of concentration, and as he bent now over the wishing machine in the dimly lit cellar and the bluish phosphorescent sparks leapt against the dark, he was impervious to the sounds outside.

The dull booming sound of the two double guns at the fort scarcely penetrated to his consciousness, and was brushed aside. It was a warning to the town that the barometer had dropped to the dreaded four tenths, and that the hurricane was on its way, but Maquarri knew nothing outside the circle of his own deep concentration.

The woman Mariquita could be heard inside the house, calling shrilly to him in her terror to come and help with the hurricane windows, but though his ears received the words, his mind did not. Mariquita, panting with terror, tugged and struggled at the heavy wooden shutters alone, but the wind, though strong, had not yet risen to its full fury, and she managed after a few attempts to close them.

As Olivier, waiting for the governor, heard the guns at the fort, he sprang to his feet. That very morning Pedro, the overlooker, had told him there was no need to fear the hurricane unless the guns sounded. Then it was time for riders from the town to hasten out to warn the planters, for the wind's first freakish prank was to tear down the telephone lines.

He made his way against the gale down Parliament Street toward his hotel, and persuaded the livery man to let him have his fastest horse.

"I can't do it, sir, without a substantial deposit," the man demurred at first. "Horses are my livelihood, you know, and the chances are he'll be killed before you reach the plantation. It's a risky ride, sir, and I'd advise you against it, but if you want to leave forty pounds on deposit, which is what he cost me, I'll let you have him."

It seemed to Olivier an eternity before the cashier at his hotel had cashed his check and he had turned over the notes to the livery man, but at last he was on the horse, clattering down Parliament Street toward the open road.

The wind increased each minute in fury, and his horse staggered and gasped, rearing back against the wall of a building. Olivier dismounted and dragged him up the street until they reached the avenue of royal palms winding along the shore to the Charing plantation. Then he mounted, once more, and flattened himself on the horse as it flew along. The trees bent and creaked in the wind, their long, bladelike leaves writhing in agony. The rain began to pound on the hard road and on the fields of young sugar-cane on either side. But there was another noise, a terrible, deafening clatter, that made itself heard above the roar of the storm. Olivier looked up and traced it to the enormous dry pods on the tall "shaggy-shaggy" trees, as the negroes called them, which kept up a deafening, continuous rattle.

The warning messengers of the hurricane itself had not yet reached the Charing plantation, but the wind had risen, and the negroes were terrified. They streamed out of the sugar mill on the estate and made their way toward the plantation house and the hurricane cellar, where they huddled in fear whenever the hurricane scare, whether false or real, came to the island.

Joan and her uncle were intent over their work in the latter's study. Lord Hubert bent over the microscope, dictating notes to Joan, who stood at his side. The girl seemed to be struggling against something, she knew not what, and she pushed back her hair with the old distracted gesture. Then something seemed suddenly to hold her in its grip, and she shuddered. The fight was hopeless. The wishing machine and Maquarri's power were greater than her own recently awakened instinct to fight, and the zodium waves held her in their grip. Her face became once more a set mask, and her eyes took on their unseeing stare. But it was a shrewd, cunning automaton who worked there with her uncle. Maquarri was forcing all her intelligence to await the exact moment to strike, and once, as she got up and stood over her uncle, fingering the poison zodium ring, she shook her head, for he looked up at the instant, and motioned that she examine the specimen he had under the microscope. The moment was not yet ready, and unknowing, unconscious, she worked in the grip of Maquarri's desires.

But at the moment there was the loud roar of the wind as it shifted and reached the plantation house, and both Joan and her uncle sprang forward to struggle with the heavy hurricane shutters. They tugged and pulled, while the wind flapped the great blinds on their iron hinges, but at last the bolts were shot and the windows secured. At the same instant the wind did its mischief with the electric wires, and the room went suddenly dark. Joan groped her way over to the shelf in the corner, and striking several matches, finally succeeded in lighting the candles which stood always ready for just such an emergency.

As she and her uncle settled once more to their work, Maquarri bent still over his machine. Mariquita, the quadroon, came clattering down into the hurricane cellar, casting a look of fury and scorn at him, but he saw nothing. She made her way over to the one narrow window that furnished air to the cellar, and swung the hurricane shutter to, but the gale in the town was by now in its full fury and the heavy wooden blind flapped and tugged in her hands. She succeeded in pulling it to, but the wind had broken off one of its hinges, and she had to press against the shutter with all her weight to keep it closed. She struggled there, muttering curses and reproaches at the hunchback, but, still unheedful, he sat crouching over his machine.

As Olivier, riding with the wind along the avenue, saw the square bulk of the gray stone Charing house in the distance, his horse suddenly reared and then swerved. A giant palm had leapt from the earth, uprooted, and sprawled across the road. The terrified horse dashed in terror across a cane field. The rain was falling in torrents, but Olivier gave him the reins and they flew across the fields in a short cut to the house.

Now he approached a small stone stable, at the foot of the avenue leading to the house, and he stopped there to stall his horse, for he saw that the place was safe. The sweating animal made straight for the open door and the stable, and Olivier lost no time in tying him fast and bolting the door.

He staggered toward the house. His linen coat and shirt were torn almost to ribbons by the ride in the wind and rain. His hair lay plastered flat against his head. Now on his knees, now crawling on his stomach for a part of the way, but never daring to stand, Olivier made his slow progress along the last hundred yards to the house. He reached the corner of the wall, his arm pressed hard against his eyes, and tried to rise. The wind picked him up with a vicious flip and he landed at the foot of the steps. In a moment, however, he had recovered his breath, and he managed to stagger to the door of the house. He battered on it with one fist while with his other hand he clung to the knob lest the wind carry him off.

As a frightened darky let him inside the door, Olivier looked about desperately.

"Miss Joan, where is she?" he cried.

"Lawdy, sir, Miss Joan and Lord Hubert, dey doan' pay no 'tention to de storm. Dey's workin', workin', all de time in him's study, sir."

Olivier waited to hear no more. He made a dash for the stairs, but as he mounted the first two steps, one of the hurricane windows in the hall came unfastened, and the wind rushed in as if about to lift the house from its foundations. The terrified darky yelled to Olivier for help, and he turned to tug and pull with him until the window was once more shut and the bolt secured.

As OLIVIER sat beside his friend's hurricane window, in the same house Joan, upstairs with her uncle, once more moved stealthily toward him. Both seemed under the wishing machine's fiendish spell, impervious to the storm outside, and Joan's face was once more unseeing and set in a mask. Lord Hubert bent over his microscope, and Joan stood over him. She looked down at his throat and fingered the deadly ring on her hand. She stood poised and ready to plunge the beetle's fang into his throat as Olivier bounded up the stairs.

He pounded on the panels, but the door was thick, and the storm outside made such a racket that the girl heard nothing. Desperately Olivier pounded and called, but Joan, caught in the wishing machine's spell, showed no sign. She waited, waited, for the right moment to plunge the ring's poisoned fang.

Terror at Joan's plight gave her lover superhuman strength. He worked frenziedly at the lock, hacking away the hard wood with a hatchet, until finally one of the panels split. A few seconds more, and he would have the door down, and he dared not stop to think of what he might find beyond that mysterious, uncanny barrier of silence.

The shivering of the door's panel seemed to arouse Joan from her trancelike purpose for a second. She looked dazed, as if trying to struggle through to the world of ordinary senses, and once more started toward the door.

As Joan hesitated, Maquarri threw an extra supply of zodium into his machine, and the sparks leapt out with renewed force. Mariquita, at the flapping hurricane shutter, screamed as a flash of lightning darted past her, but Maquarri paid no attention. The room darkened again, and as the sparks leapt and glowed against the blackness, he could be faintly discerned in his crouching position.

With that extra release of the zodium waves, Joan's fate was sealed. Like a steel mask quickly clamped over her, she lost her power to struggle. She turned back to her uncle and bent over him, aiming to strike.

At the moment, Olivier's hatchet crashed its final blow, for the door fell in, and he sprang forward into the room and to Joan's side. His outstretched arm grasped hers as it made its downward swoop to her uncle's throat, and in the next instant Lord Hubert, weak under the zodium spell, had fainted, and Joan struggled in her lover's arms. She saw but did not know him, and he groaned as he bent all his energies to calm the madwoman who lashed about, now trying to stab him with the ring's fang, now struggling away from him toward the man who lay sprawled over the faintly luminous microscope.

With a superhuman effort, Olivier grasped Joan's hand and twisted her wrist to hold her still. Then, with his other hand, he grasped at the deadly ring and pulled it from her finger, tossing it across the room. Joan almost fainted against him in the reaction, and now he was all tenderness in his relief.

"Joan, Joan, my darling!" he cried, supporting her against him, and kissing her pale cheeks and bloodless mouth. "Joan, fight your way back, my darling! It's all right now. He can never hurt you again. It's my fault for not realizing before that the ring had something to do with it, but now that we know, you have nothing to fear."

The terrified negroes had carried Lord Hubert off to bed, and Joan and Olivier were alone in the dimly lit study. The hurricane, in a last outburst, fairly shook the foundations of the house, but neither heeded. Gradually the color came back to Joan's face, as she lifted it to her lover.

The last fierce outburst of the storm wreaked its vengeance on the man who had dared to defy the forces of nature. As Professor Maquarri crouched over his machine, Mariquita, tugging at the hurricane window, screamed and swooned as a flash of lightning darted into the cellar. It leapt at the figure crouching there, and there was a clatter as Maquarri sprawled dead over his luminous machine.

For several hours the tail of the hurricane lashed about the Charing plantation house, and Joan and Olivier, waiting in the drawing room for it to abate, stopped suddenly in the making of plans for the future as they sat hand in hand. The candle flame on the table near them burned with a steady light now, where a moment before it had leapt and flickered.

"Come, it is over, the worst of it," cried Joan, and she led Olivier to the door in the great hall. They listened before shooting back the bolts, and

the comparative quiet reassuring them, they opened the door and stood framed there, looking down the long avenue. Several giant palms lay uprooted across the path, and scraps of debris littered the place, but the wind had gone as suddenly as it had come, and the glimpse of the sea beyond the lime grove belied the fields of flattened cane.

The young moon had risen over a strangely calm landscape that evening when Joan and Olivier started out on the drive to town to find out if harm had come to Christopher C. Quinn. Pedro, driving in front, sat staring straight ahead of him, and Olivier's arm was about Joan as the old carriage jogged along. At a turn of the road, Quinn himself came cantering up, on horseback, his bandaged leg swinging free of one stirrup.

"The tail of the storm swung away from Plymouth sooner than it left the plantation," he explained, "and so I set out to find out what I could about reaching you. I went first thing to the woman Mariquita's house, and found it a wreck. One of the hurricane windows had given way in the cellar, and the wind had done its worst.

"The quadroon had gone, no one knows where, but Maquarri himself lay sprawled over a fiendish sort of contraption, the machine you had thought of, Phil. At first I thought he had fainted from fright, but when I turned him over, he was stone dead. Looked as if he had been struck by lightning, or by a cross current from his own fiendish machine."

Quinn finished his tale of the disaster in the town as the three rode back to the plantation house. He insisted on examining the strange beetle-winged ring that Joan had worn, and the two men groaned at their own obtuseness in the past. The winged ring had been the key to the whole puzzle, and they had been blind to it.

"Well, never mind," Quinn comforted the younger man. "It takes a rogue to catch a rogue, and old Mother Nature, realizing our integrity, decided she needed a hurricane to finish him off, eh?"

"What about the accomplice, the man Felix?"

"Done for, too, and a good thing," answered Quinn. "The boat that left this morning for St. John's, with him aboard, caught the first onrush of the hurricane and went down with all on board. Shame about the others, but he's no great loss."

Olivier was thoughtful.

"What shall you do about this hypnotic power you've discovered in the zodium?" asked Quinn.

"I've thought of that. I shall publish my discoveries to the world, now that I'm sure of them, as the Curies did. Zodium will be even rarer and more expensive than radium, so there's not much chance of its falling into unscrupulous hands, but if it should, by any chance, the public will be warned. You see, it absolutely carries out my theories of healing. No one can be hypnotized against his will, even by the powerful Zeta-rays, so once the public knows the danger of hypnotism from that source, the danger is squashed."

"And the cures?" asked Quinn.

"Ah, there! You know my theory: fill a man with strength and sunshine, give a human being a fresh infusion of life, of the youth of matter, and his mental balance is automatically restored. With a plenitude of vitality, fear vanishes."

Once more he smiled.

"And fear, my friend, is, as you know, at the bottom of all mental troubles."

THE END.

NOTE.—*The first two installments of "Wings of Power" were published in* WEIRD TALES *for January and February. These issues will be mailed to any address for 25 cents each.*

BLACK CURTAINS

by G. Frederick Montefiore

VICTOR STAPLETON, artist, seated himself opposite the gloomy black curtains that covered the folding doors separating his studio from the next room.

"I want to paint something different," he thought, "something to wake them up! Gruesome, perhaps, but with a touch of pathos and the ever-necessary feminine interest!"

It had occurred to him that gazing at certain objects which have the effect of not imposing any marked impression on the mind leaves that organ freer to roam the realms of imagination. The crystal used by the seer has no intrinsic power of revealing past or future, but the watcher, because his eyes, though open, see only the crystal's nothingness which neutralizes the immediate earthly sights, brings his mind into a receptive state for supernormal visions.

It suggested itself to the artist that those black, velvet curtains might take the place of the crystal and give him precisely that effect of staring into nothingness.

Long he sat, pondering, conjuring up fanciful scenes, mentally placing one character in juxtaposition with another of harshly opposite tendencies; raking over half-forgotten ideas of his earliest imaginings for startling subjects; now shutting his eyes completely, now through half-closed lids, allowing his sight to play upon the black curtains. But nothing came. No passion-filled, new idea swept into his brain. No grotesque fantasm, molded from life's realities, flashed before him, to be caught, analyzed and committed to tangible pigments and canvas.

His thoughts strayed from the intended picture and he began to muse idly on the man who had recently taken the next room to his. Old Mr. Fland was reputed to be a miser, and wild tales had been told of his strangling the poor relations who came to him begging for a share of his gold. Victor had not yet seen him, but the landlady had chattered, and he had once spoken a word to the old man's granddaughter, a girl of singular beauty, possessed of masses of golden hair that had excited the artist's pictorial instinct. He had frequently heard the girl and the old man quarreling, and the landlady had expressed a fear that some day the miser would kill his granddaughter, as he was said to have killed his other relations. "And then," she had added tremulously, "he'll thrust her body away somewhere to get it out of his sight!"

Hours passed and the artist was about to give up his vigil, as nothing came—nothing came—Hush!

What was that?

A hand, lean and yellow, was slowly pushing its way through the black curtains.

The artist was on his feet, his eyes staring, a strange sinking sensation pervading his whole body.

Then appeared the head, the grinning, maniacal face, of a yellow and shriveled old man, blinking and leering at the artist with baleful eyes.

"I—I didn't know you were in," wheezed a voice. "You were so very quiet! I—I would like to make your acquaintance. Won't you come into my room? It is larger than yours. You are an artist, eh? I have many things of interest to an artist. I have a granddaughter! Ha!"

He chuckled in a weirdly enticing way, while a second skinny claw appeared and rubbed itself over the other one.

Victor was indignant at the intrusion, but inclined to forgive the old man because he was reputed to be half-witted. Perhaps he really did need human companionship . . . besides — the granddaughter! — with hair of gold!

He followed the old man through the black curtains and into the room which the folding doors had concealed.

They sat together in a musty room breathing antiquity from every corner, before a little oil stove. One feeble gas jet sent its yellow rays down upon the miser's cheerless face. His mouth was toothless, his nose hooked and seemingly as devoid of flesh as the beak of a bird. The skin was stretched so tightly over his temples that his skull seemed to be breaking through it to summon its owner to the grave; while the cheeks were so sunken that the artist fancied, with a quaint twist of thought, that they must have encroached uncomfortably upon his mouth space.

This strange old man seemed well aware of his own shortcomings, for his eyes gloated upon the handsome face and physique of the artist.

Noting the latter's glances of distaste around the room, he laid his yellow talon on his knee and said: "Looks old and shriveled, doesn't it? Like its owner! But it has hidden beauties! There is gold hidden here! Yes, gold!"

His shrill voice arose to a shriek and he writhed in delight.

"Gold! Hidden gold! And—" (he crept over and put his dry lips close to the artist's ear) "it's yours! the gold is all yours — if you can find it!"

He wriggled back into his chair, his limbs shivering with mocking laughter at what he thought a magnificent joke . . . "If you can find it!"

Then, as Victor remained silent, sickened by the atmosphere of the place, he continued briskly: "Look for it! Search for the gold! Get up! If you find it, it's yours!"

Thankful for an excuse for moving about, and shaking the horror from him, Victor arose and began the strangest search that even his Bohemian existence, spent among art treasures, antiques and grotesqueries, had ever led him into.

He opened first the top drawer of a desk, ancient and emitting an odor of decay. He inserted his hand; the light was too feeble to trust alone to sight. He withdrew it with a cry of horror, echoed by a mirthless chuckle from the old man. His touch had encountered the five hewn fingers of a human hand!

He pulled the drawer wide open.

The old man laughed. His cries rang through the room.

"Not there!" he howled. "Not that time! Some one else looked there—and you see what happened to him!"

It was true, then, as the landlady had said. This detestable old wretch murdered the people, kinfolk no doubt, who came to him for money,

then concealed horrid momentoes of his deeds about this temple of his iniquities.

Victor felt that he would go insane if he remained longer in that polluted air. He stumbled toward the folding doors and his own room, which he had already made up his mind to vacate on the morrow, but the miser's ghoulish hands restrained him.

"Search for it!" he cried. "Look for my gold. It's yours—if you find it! And remember—my granddaughter!"

He tantalized the artist cunningly. He knew, and Victor knew, that he could not leave the place while thoughts of the girl and her possible danger from the fiend filled his brain.

"Search!" snarled the old man. "Find the gold!"

Victor was now searching wildly among all the rot and stench that the unhallowed place possessed. He raised a glass bowl with a hollow stem that looked like a place of concealment, and from the stem protruded the shorn lips of a man.

He dashed the bowl to fragments on the floor and fled, trembling and white, into a corner.

"Ha, ha, ha!" rasped the maniac. "Another one looked there, and see what he got! He speaks of gold no more. His lips! Ha, ha!"

"Let me go!" cried Victor, in a strange voice. "Let me go, I say! Why do you hold me in this accursed place to torture me? Let me go, I say!"

He held out his hands in supplication.

The old man seemed to have him chained to the room by an influence that drained the will from his victim.

"Find the gold!" he snarled. "Search and find." Then suddenly: "Look behind you!"

Victor turned as if galvanized. His eyes encountered a picture, its subject obliterated by grime. He tore it aside, and there in a niche in the wall a skull grinned derision at him.

Madly battering his clenched fists against the grisly piece of bone, laughing and sobbing in hideous fright, he dashed across the room. But before he reached the folding doors his frenzied eyes saw a tall, straight cupboard which he had not before observed. By some odd trick of the mind he resolved to undo his tormentor and discover his gold, even if it cost his reason. He tore at the knob of the door and immediately had the cupboard open.

Something heavy—something that had been leaning against the door, fell into his very arms. It was the body of a girl, strangely beautiful, with masses of golden hair piled high upon her head and falling in a glittering riot about her white shoulders.

She fell limply upon his chest. At first he dreaded she had met the fate of the other searchers, but gladly he felt her heart beat and knew that the warmth of life was still within her.

Eagerly his arms encircled her and he turned her around so that his eyes might the better see the wonder of her beauty. Then his eyes fell to her breast, and all the horror of that night was as a frolic to the enormity of dread that seemed to freeze his soul as he saw, sticking in her bosom, a knife.

And this had been all the time he was in the room—and he had not known!

"So you've found it!" the voice of the hell-fiend wheezed from behind him. "You've found my gold? You like it? Look at it! See! On her head!"

His hideous claw touched her hair.

"Gold! All gold!"

Victor, supporting the girl with one arm, seized the handle of the knife to draw it from its human sheath. At that instant the old man uttered a peculiar, shrill whistle, the like of which

he had never before heard. Immediately the door was thrown open and two men entered.

"Caught!" screamed the old man. "See the murderer! With his hand on the dagger, plunging it into her heart!"

Victor turned. The body of the girl slipped from his arm. He looked into the barrels of two automatic pistols.

"Caught!" chuckled the old man. "Caught red-handed!"

VICTOR, facing the guns, backed slowly through the folding door into his own room and sank inert into the armchair. A slight gust of wind caught the black velvet curtains and they fell together, leaving him in total darkness.

"Yes," he said to himself, "I think that wounded girl on the chest of the handsome young man, those two leveled guns, held by the two grim executors of the law, the grisly skull and the hideous old man grinning in the background will make an excellently gruesome but romantic picture for the jaded public taste. By Jove, I got some inspiration from sitting in the dark and staring at those old black curtains after all!"

He rose with a satisfied smile and stretched his long-cramped limbs.

"Good old curtains!" he cried aloud.

As he spoke he laughingly gave the curtains a thump. His hand went through the curtains and as he drew it back he saw that the fingers were stained red.

He tore aside the hangings, and there lolled against him the body of a young girl, the hair a piteous mass of red and . . . *gold!*

"My God!" he cried. "Old Fland *did* murder his granddaughter, and thrust her body through the folding doors while I dozed and fancied! And she has been there—like that—all the time!"

A faint, dry chuckle came from behind the black curtains.

In WEIRD TALES *for April*

The

HAUNTING EYES

By EUDORA RAMSAY RICHARDSON

Author of "The Voice of Euphemia"

A powerful tale of ghostly justice and the tortures of remorse

On Sale Everywhere March First

He Listened to a Fearsome and Almost Incredible Tale, and He Realized It Was True

The BAND *of* GOLD

By JACK WOODFORD

"WHEN one has money," remarked Lester Copley, lazily swinging one leg across the other and inhaling deeply of his cigar, "one can do anything."

"Right you are," agreed Enrique, the cynic, "and it is the fault of such men as you that this is so."

Copley looked up in mild surprize.

"The fault of such men as you," repeated Enrique, firmly. "Still, after all, perhaps I am a little hasty; for, when one looks deeper into the situation, one comes inevitably to the conclusion that, after all, it is the fault of society at large—that is, directly. Indirectly, you, my dear Copley, are one of those upon whom censure must fall."

"Why?" Copley scented an argument, and although Enrique invariably got the best of him, Copley never failed to profit by the interchange.

"Because you will not print facts about the wealthy that if given publicity would. . . . You admit, of course, that you *do* suppress certain facts in the lives of—"

"Never," said Copley, decisively. "Our reporters, our editors, understand that they are to get the truth and print it—regardless!"

Enrique laughed tolerantly.

"That course, my dear friend, as you well know, would wreck any American newspaper in two weeks."

"Stuff and nonsense—what have we suppressed?"

Enrique waved his hand as if to indicate that the retort was worthless.

"My dear Copley, why do you insist—?"

Copley grinned, a way he had—this gesture never failed to rouse Enrique; this, perhaps, was why Copley so often did it. Enrique frowned.

"My dear Copley, I shall tell you a story, the facts of which can be easily checked up. This story, if printed, would make the greatest feature story that any American newspaper ever heard of—and I assert without fear of successful contradiction (as your editorial writers might phrase it) that you not only will refuse to consider printing the story, but you will not even attempt to check up on the facts."

Copley looked sober and defiant. Enrique eyed him strangely and leaned farther back in his chair. A glance about assured him that the club was well-nigh deserted; no one could possibly overhear them.

"You, of course, know of Mrs. Zander, and the strange rumors about her in the past ten years or so."

"I only know that in some manner she is said to have rejuvenated herself," said Copley, shortly.

"You also know," drawled Enrique, flicking a speck of ash from his coat, "that Mrs. Zander is tremendously wealthy."

"Of course," agreed Copley a little sharply.

"Perhaps you have also noticed that since that day when she returned to New York some years ago, apparently restored to youth's estate in some strange, unknown manner, she has never been seen in public without the peculiarly shaped neckpiece that she wears. It is a most extraordinary neckpiece, made for her by a Parisian lapidary. It is about an inch wide, and is formed of real gold cloth for a basis. There are diamonds and other precious stones and—"

"I have often seen the trinket," admitted Copley.

"Remember it well," said Enrique very seriously, "for without it you lose the key to my tale; and, incidentally, it would afford you the first means of checking up on my narrative.

"MRS. ZANDER, when she was a young woman, was, as you probably know, considered the most famous beauty in New York. Her disposition, however, was considered—well, not so good.

"If I remember rightly, it was along about the time that she was forty-five or so that young Lieutenant Zander took her eye. It was a merry enough romance at first. The young lieutenant, in search of money, and the rather middle-aged lady in search of—of young lieutenants.

"It is seldom, indeed, that Mrs. Zander does any foolish, ill-advised thing, and I was not the only one who thought it quite strange when she took into her service a beautiful young French girl, as a personal maid, about the time of her engagement to the lieutenant.

"Few, aside from myself, know the story of how the young army man fell suddenly and desperately in love with the maid, once he had seen her, and broke off his engagement with his older love—well, he did exactly that. In fact, he did more than that: he planned to elope with the lovely young French girl. And who could blame him? She had a faultless, lithe figure, one of those narrow-hipped, rhythmical figures that are so often called 'boyish'. Properly dressed, she would have caused a furor in any salon in New York at that time. Poor Mrs. Zander's figure could, of course, in all honesty have been termed nothing but a 'stylish stout.'

"When Lieutenant Zander broke off his engagement with her, Mrs. Zander went into a perfect frenzy of hysterics, and called in the doctor who told me this story. She begged him to restore to her the charms that had once been hers; raved for hours against the heavy mantle of years which she must carry, and swore by everything in which she had faith that she would grow no older, and that youth should be hers again. She told the doctor that she stood ready and willing to risk her life in the attempt to be young again, and that she would far rather die trying to become youthful than live and see the years creep upon her. When my friend had assured her that he could do nothing, she cursed him as roundly as a London fishwoman would curse a cabby who had nearly run her down—and in much the same language.

"She ended up her tirade by demanding that he introduce her to young Fischbeck, the surgeon, who, you remember, some years ago, was struck from the register for performing *outré* operations of one sort or another.

"My friend quite properly refused to do this, but, in some way, she managed to get hold of Fischbeck, and shortly thereafter the three (Mrs. Zander, Fischbeck, and the lovely young maid) suddenly disappeared. No one knows where they went, except that it was somewhere in Europe.

"For several years nothing was heard of the trio. Lieutenant Zander

went to Europe and searched high and low, but returned without trace of them. They were known to have arrived in London; but, beyond that city, if indeed they left it, no trace was to be had. Even Mrs. Zander's own attorneys were ignorant of her whereabouts."

"I remember all that," broke in Copley impatiently. "Fischbeck turned up at Monte Carlo some years later, lost a fortune at the tables, and committed suicide."

"Exactly," agreed Enrique.

A SERVANT stole into the now nearly darkened room, and, looking questioningly at Enrique, reached toward the electric switch to turn on the lights. Enrique shook his head, and the servant departed, leaving the room in darkness except for the reflected glow of the electric signs across the way.

"I saw Mrs. Zander shortly after her return to New York," Enrique went on after a minute. "She was stunning. She seemed, somehow, to be taller; and her figure! Strong, well molded young limbs, and narrow, boyish hips; she looked like a girl of twenty. Even her face, while it did not seem to have quite shared the complete transformation that her figure had undergone, was younger. She seemed to have unlimited, vibrant health and zest. She was, to all intents and purposes, a woman of twenty again. Perhaps, my friend, you can finish the story for yourself now?"

Copley looked puzzled. "The only thing I can add," he said, "is what everyone knows: that Lieutenant Zander tried to kill her in her apartments one night, and then, a few days later, strangely enough, married her—though many people seemed to think that he hated her at the time he married her, and has hated her every moment since, but for some strange reason continues to live with her."

"Exactly," admitted Enrique, putting the slim tips of his fingers together and looking across at Copley out of narrow eyes.

"Well?" said Copley after a minute.

Enrique looked a trifle impatient now. Only when an especially large sign across the street flashed on could the two men see each other's faces.

"My dear Copley," drawled Enrique, "need I add that the maid was never heard from again to this day?"

"My God!" said Copley, under his breath, after a time. "You mean—?"

He stopped, overcome.

"Exactly!" smiled Enrique. "Now, my friend, will you print *that* story in your estimable paper, or even investigate it?"

"No! Heaven forbid!" said Copley, tensely.

Presently the servant appeared again.

"Turn on the lights!" snapped Copley, addressing the servant irritably.

WE ARE going to turn The Eyrie this month over to our readers. There is room for only a small percentage of the letters that pour in to the editor's desk, but even so, these reflect the spirit of the others, and you, the readers, will be interested in knowing what other readers think about us.

"At last I have found a magazine to my liking," writes J. L. Pountney, of Cleveland, Ohio. "I picked up one of your magazines the other evening, and didn't go to bed till I had finished every bit of it."

Another reader whom WEIRD TALES has deprived of sleep is Hubert Blankenship, of Portsmouth, Ohio, who writes: "Sometimes I sit up all night and read the weird stories in your magazine. I look forward to getting the magazine as soon as it gets in at the corner book store."

Catharine Hartley Griggs, of Waterbury, Connecticut, writes: "I like WEIRD TALES because it is the only magazine that fills the natural human craving for stories of the strange and mysterious."

And Frank G. Malone, of Cleveland, Ohio, writes: "Never have I read such fascinating stories. I read, or have read, almost every fiction magazine published, and can truthfully say that I have yet to find the magazine with stories equal to the ones in WEIRD TALES. I have recommended your magazine, and find those I have recommended it to are waiting as anxiously as I am for the next issue."

This is very gratifying, but sh! not too loud, or we may get some hard knocks. But no; the next letter is even more enthusiastic. It is from Anne Forman Ellis, of Norfolk, Virginia, who writes: "Doubtless many of your readers have perused their recent copies of WEIRD TALES under more difficult conditions or in stranger surroundings or at points farther away than I, but I think that for anyone not a professional traveler I may claim the palm for long-distance commuting in my reading, for I read part of the May-June-July quarterly while on my way from Norfolk to California in July, the rest of it on my return trip a week later, the November number while on my way out again in October, the December number as I returned this month—a total of some 14,500 miles to the three copies. To me the apotheosis of comfort and content is the Pullman berth with its drawn curtains shutting out the world, the lulling rock of the fast train, a box of carefully selected chocolates AND a copy of the newest WEIRD TALES with its delightful shudders."

Leo A. Borah, who wrote "The House of Dust," comes under suspicion of causing a cat-fit by the vividness of his narrative. Mrs. Lilla May Savino, of Portsmouth, Virginia, writes: "I read the first installment of 'The House of Dust' to my son and daughter, aged respectively sixteen and thirteen, and

when I came to the part where the doctor discovers the body and breaks down the door, our little yellow kitten, who lay toasting herself under the coal stove, flew off into a hard fit! With a wild yell, the youngsters threw over their chairs and fled in terror to the hall, and my son remarked afterward that the story was so gruesome it scared the cat into a fit!"

Several of our readers show a particular preference for astronomical stories. Edward Schultz, of Buffalo, writes: "Let me congratulate you on the excellent stories you are publishing. Let us have astronomical stories, journeys in other worlds, universes and planets. 'The Earth Girl' was an excellent example of this type of story. Also let us have stories of scientific discoveries. And by all means we want all the stories possible by the author of 'The Desert Lich' and 'Death-Waters.' The latter and 'The Earth Girl' were the two best stories of your December issue."

Harold Weight, of Pasadena, California, is another who wants astronomical tales. He writes: "I like the magazine much better in its new form. Why not give us more astronomical stories? I think these are much more interesting than your murder stories."

To Mr. Weight and Mr. Schultz and a dozen others who have written in similar vein, let us announce that next month's WEIRD TALES will print an astronomical story which is one of the most gripping and vivid narratives this magazine has ever had the good fortune to obtain. It is called "When the Green Star Waned," and is by Nictzin Dyalhis, a writer new to the readers of WEIRD TALES. But we are forgetting that we promised to turn this month's Eyrie over to you, the readers. Sorry, but we are so enthusiastic about Mr. Dyalhis' story that we just couldn't refrain from speaking about it.

S. E. Fogeson, of San Francisco, writes: "You asked in your November number about changing certain stories. I would say to leave the magazine as it is now. I think it is one of the best on the market. It is a magazine that is not afraid to publish 'out of the rut' stories. One unforgettable story in the November issue is 'John Caroll, Legionary of Rome'."

Alfred H. Richards, of Flint, Michigan, puts the magazine to practical use. "I find WEIRD TALES a great help," he writes, "when there is an occasion where a ghost or horror story is requested of me, as at socials, boy scout camps, camp-fires, etc. I then tell in my own words a story memorized from the magazine. I can well remember my delight when I first 'discovered' WEIRD TALES at the news stands—I read a story it contained about half through before I 'came to'. I bought the magazine, and since then I haven't missed a single number."

"Let's have some more stories of Haiti by Burks," writes Victor R. Knapik, of Chicago; and Cecil Fuller, of Tulare, California, asks for "another story if possible by Ramón de las Cuevas." Still another reader asks for more stories by "the two greatest weird-story authors in the world: H. P. Lovecraft and B. Wallis."

Herbert Silversmith, of Chicago, makes some interesting comments on the January issue: "Reading WEIRD TALES for the first time, I wish to tell you that I thoroughly enjoyed every moment of the period spent in 'consuming' them. Previous to this time I had seen your magazine on news stands, but I did not purchase it as I thought it might be the 'Diamond Dick' sort of reading; but having it recommended to me, and seeing it in the new form, I went to the news stand and asked the dealer for a copy. The answer I received was: 'Sorry, sir, but I sold all the copies I had and I have ordered some, so if you come in tomorrow I can have some for you.' I then went to another

stand and bought a copy. After I had finished reading it, I closed the book and sat for—I don't know how long—until my sister came and woke me from my revery. That magazine absolutely intrigued me—especially the story, 'The Rajah's Gift'. That story did not quite reach the point of being weird, but, nevertheless, it reached the Everest of perfection in its own way."

Lester Thomas, of Topeka, Kansas, writes: "Keep the WEIRD TALES in accord with what the name suggests. Please give us some more stories of the type in which science and horror are combined, such as 'The Brain in the Jar.' I think they are the most interesting. Give us some more stories of the outer spaces of this universe."

Another letter opposing any change in the style of stories comes from Leslie A. Wilson, of Toronto, Canada, who writes: "I believe that the magazine as it stands is A-1 splendid, and to change the stories would spoil the magazine. As it is, the magazine lives up to its name. I have always enjoyed the stories in WEIRD TALES, as they are unique, and it is a pleasure to read something out of the ordinary."

"W. T. carries some brilliant short stories," writes Sidney E. Johnson, from Joplin, Missouri. "I don't believe that sort would ever pall. I vote for 'Arhl-a of the Caves' as the best story in the January issue. And let me say that if Mr. Eddy will attempt to show up in fiction the origin of man's belief in the supernatural—how it began with his fear of 'Night and the Noseless One'—he will indeed have a wonderful theme to work on."

William A. P. White, of San Rafael, California, writes: "I heartily approve of the results of the poll for the November number, but, personally, I believe in the motto, 'the gruesomer, the better.' I think Frank Belknap Long is a great find. Please get another story from Ramón de las Cuevas, and also from Otis Adelbert Kline. All in all, your magazine suits me 'right down to the ground'."

H. Warner Munn, of Athol, Massachusetts, writes: "I am indeed delighted that Lovecraft is to be a steady contributor. WEIRD TALES discovered him, I believe; and if it had never done anything else, that would be sufficient reason for its continued existence. You are doing a great work in publishing stories that the great ultraconservative magazines might refuse."

We like such comment, for it makes us feel that we are on the right track. And we study—oh, so carefully!—the few letters that find fault with the magazine. There are not many of these, and we might throw these into the wastebasket on the theory that one can't please everybody; but instead of that, we examine every criticism, even the slightest, that is made of WEIRD TALES. For this magazine is yours, and we want to consult you, the readers, in everything. It is because you liked "The Brain in the Jar" so well that we are offering you "The Composite Brain" in this issue.

And now as to the poll of stories in the January issue. "Out of the Long Ago," Seabury Quinn's werewolf story, is fighting it out for first honors with "The Ocean Leech," by Frank Belknap Long, Jr., as this issue goes to press. It is impossible to say which of the two will be the readers' final choice, as they are running a neck-and-neck race. Within hailing distance of the two leaders come "Invaders From Outside," by J. Schlossel; "Luisma's Return," by Arthur J. Burks; and "The Festival," by H. P. Lovecraft.

What is your favorite story in this issue? Send in the name of your choice to The Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 317 Baldwin Building, Indianapolis, Indiana.

The Last of the Teeheemen

(Continued from page 20)

in the forest with the other men of the expedition."

"How wonderful!" she exclaimed. "You can never realize the life I have lived in this savage country since I was first captured by the horrible men with claws instead of fingers and toes! My dear father, how he has suffered, too! And to think that he never ceased to search for me, and now he is about to succeed after all this time!"

The bluff was finally scaled by the members of the party, Holton aiding Rosalie Sharon in making the difficult ascent up the face of the bluff. When the top had been reached, Duros sounded a warning. More than a hundred of the dog-faced warriors were coming at full speed across the fields at the top of the line of bluffs in rapid pursuit of the Duros followers.

"We will fight them back at the edge of the forest," Duros called, "while you take the woman of the white gods to the platform. From there, retreat to the city of Teeheemen. All of my people have reached there by now. Organize them and tell them to make weapons and prepare for a battle, for these men of Ugu, when they learn fully what has happened, will attempt to retake the city."

Holton followed the command of Duros, and fled with Rosalie to the border of the jungle. He cast one glance backward at the fight taking place in the fields, and saw that Duros and his men were taking a fearful toll of the dog-faced creatures.

"Duros will win and reach the city of Teeheemen in safety!" Holton exclaimed as he assisted the girl through the jungle undergrowth. "We shall reach the camping place, where the others are awaiting my return, in a couple of hours. Once we are in the city of Teeheemen, we shall be safe,

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for there will be nothing to block our progress through the hollow mountain to the outer world and then back home."

The progress of the two through the undergrowth was slow. The attire of the girl was so scanty that she was a constant victim to the sharp-pointed leaves that adorned some of the underbrush. Holton preceded her and broke the way to make travel for her as easy as possible.

They had traveled for about an hour when Holton paused for a moment to allow her to rest.

"We are not more than half an hour's distance from the camp," he said encouragingly, and glanced at her brown hair and shapely shoulders.

"Do you think we have made our escape certain?" she asked, raising her eyes to his.

Holton returned her look and noted her anxious manner.

"I think that we are as safe as we could expect to be in such a country. There is little prospect of the dog-faced men finding us at once. We shall be at camp in a short time and it is but a three-hour march in a straight line to the deserted city of Teeheemen."

"I shall rest easier when we are there," she replied, smiling. "My rescue seems like a dream. I am fearful that I am not really awake and that I may come to myself and find it is only a dream."

"Well," he laughed, "you have my assurance that it is not a dream, but a reality."

As Holton spoke the last word, a tremendous bellow reverberated through the jungle. Again it was repeated, and yet again.

"What is that?" she questioned, anxiously.

"The great beast teeheemen!" he responded, examining the magazine of his rifle and hurriedly inserting a number of fresh cartridges.

"What is a teeheemen?" she asked, placing her hand on his arm.

"One of the greatest animals that treads the earth today," he explained. "The one that just sounded its challenge is the last of its kind in the world."

"Let us flee from here!" she urged.

"It is best to remain quiet for a time," he advised. "To continue our way at present might result in our running into the creature or making such a disturbance in the underbrush that its attention will be attracted and lead to an attack upon us."

"Is the beast you speak of a flesh-eating creature?"

"It is," he replied.

The loud, roaring bellow again sounded through the jungle, and this time the challenge of the beast was much closer to the man and woman who crouched in the brush near the base of a gigantic tree.

"It's coming toward us," Holton warned, peering in the direction from which the last challenge had issued. "If it finds us, it will charge. Get behind the tree, for it is a cumbersome creature and when enraged rushes about blindly."

A crashing of the brush a short distance away revealed to the man and woman the place where the beast might be expected to emerge. A moment later its towering form with the extended neck and enormous, snake-shaped head, came into view.

The creature evidently had located the man and woman through its sense of smell. It recognized them as desirable prey, and had crowded its way through the jungle until it stood

before the spot where they were watching for its appearance.

Rosalie Sharon stood for a moment terrorized by the enormity of the beast confronting them.

To Holton's repeated order to get behind the tree she responded quickly just as the teeheemen opened its enormous mouth, exposing rows of sawlike teeth to view. As the mouth opened, a deafening, bellowing challenge was roared out. The great, greenish eyes of the monster fastened on the man and woman. Still roaring, it lunged forward.

Holton, with the first appearance of the beast, had brought his rifle forward. He aimed at a point where the foreleg of the monster was connected with the middle of the great body. Three times he fired before the great beast was upon him. The bullets found their mark, for the animal's rage became demoniac as it made a last lunge toward Holton, standing at the base of the tree. When the third shot had been fired, Holton realized that he must elude the charge of the beast or it would crush him beneath the weight of its great body.

He leapt to the side of Rosalie Sharon behind the tree trunk just in time to escape the bellowing monster, which collided with the trunk of the tree with tremendous impact and fell crashing to the earth. The beast rolled over on its side and began regaining its feet. Holton poured a half dozen shots into its body with great rapidity. The great animal struggled to its feet and charged, evidently seeking its elusive prey. Holton fired again.

It halted a short distance from the place where Rosalie and Holton were standing. Again it sensed their location and again returned to charge them. Holton poured a stream of shots into its body and again eluded the beast's charge. Rosalie got behind the tree, and Holton, firing at the creature until it was upon him

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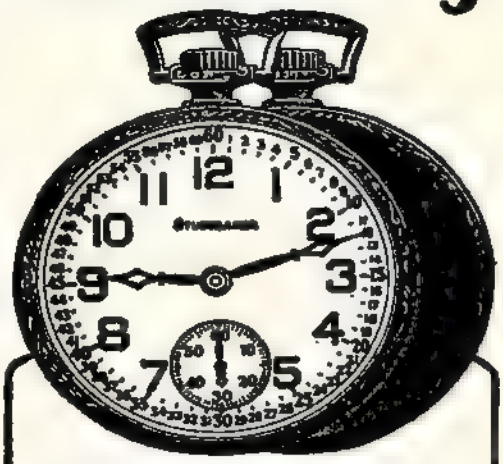

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again, leapt around the base of the tree away from the monster.

The teeheemen, however, showed some signs of intelligence, for it profited by its former collision with the tree and halted suddenly in its wild rush.

With wild bellowings, it began circling the base of the great tree in pursuit of the man and woman.

Holton changed his aim and fired at one of the enormous eyes. His aim was true, and the shot blinded the beast on that side. Blood was streaming in torrents from a dozen wounds in its body as it charged wildly about the thicket in the vicinity of the tree. It wheeled about and came toward the tree again. Holton got a shot at the remaining eye. After a continuation of its blind chargings, the teeheemen, showing signs of weakening from its wounds, turned and crashed blindly through the undergrowth in the direction of the camp toward which Holton and Rosalie had been marching.

When it had disappeared, the two resumed their march for the camp of the party, following the trail which the great beast had left through the brush, as traveling it was much easier than making a path through the undergrowth for themselves. The trail was marked by the life blood of the badly wounded monster.

"If we again encounter the beast," explained Holton, "we shall have no trouble in eluding it, for both of its eyes have been shot away."

Rosalie Sharon tripped, and but for Holton's quick action in supporting her would have fallen. When she regained her footing she held to his arm, and the two walked slowly through the dense jungle toward the camp where the others were becoming anxious over the delayed arrival of Holton.

9

Benton was the first to awaken after a restless night spent on the platform in the tree. Leaving the other members of the party resting on the platform, he descended to the foot of the grapevine ladder.

He walked about in the vicinity for a time, and when he returned to the base of the camp tree he found that Otter had followed him to the ground.

"I've been worrying about Holton," he remarked as he approached Benton. "He has been bucking a bunch of birds with whom he is not acquainted."

"True," Benton admitted. "I have been thinking about his scouting alone with Duros, though I could readily understand that it was better for two to go than our entire party. We should have been more easily detected than the two will be."

A movement in the underbrush a short distance from the tree aroused the attention of the two. The movement continued, and both dropped to the earth to avoid detection.

Their movement was not quick enough, for their action had been observed.

"It's an army marching through the jungle," Benton whispered. "They may pass without detecting our location."

He was mistaken, for the head of the column suddenly swung straight toward the tree.

Otter and Benton thrust their rifles forward, determined to sell their lives as dearly as possible. The first of the marchers came into view through the tall brush.

An exclamation of delight escaped Benton as he lowered his rifle and leapt to his feet.

"They are the men of Teeheemen!" he said.

The two advanced to meet the olive-colored men.

One of the leaders of the vanguard

rushed to the two white men and extended his hand in greeting.

"Duros told us the white gods had returned," he announced. "We are the last of the prisoners of the river caves. We are marching to the city of Teeheemen. Others of our people have preceded us in the night. There are more than a thousand of us in this body, both men and women."

In reply to the questions of Otter and Benton, the leaders of the column told of the dramatic rescue of the people from the prison caves.

"But we must hasten to our deserted city," the men finally announced. "We have spears to make and other preparations to establish for the defense of our city."

The column resumed its march through the jungle, and Benton turned to Otter when the last had receded into the undergrowth.

"So that is what has been keeping Holton," he exclaimed.

"That duffer has been having a whale of a time, and we have lost out," Otter lamented. "Wait until he returns."

Sharon descended from the platform, followed by the three guides of the party, and listened to Benton's explanation of the release of the men of Teeheemen from the prison caves, as they had told it to him.

While the party were conversing, a wild bellowing roar disturbed the quiet of the scene.

"The teeheemen!" Otter exclaimed, looking at the magazine of his rifle.

"Yes, and it's headed in this direction," Benton added.

The bellow was repeated again.

"There's something the matter with the animal," Otter remarked. "His voice has lost some of its kick."

Benton listened intently.

"I believe you are correct. It acts like a creature in great distress."

Nearer the teeheemen came to the camp tree, and as it approached the

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spot its calls continued to weaken. A short distance from the place the men saw it pause and totter. A few agonized roars issued from it, and the forest remained quiet.

"What ails the devil?" Otter queried.

"You and I will investigate," Benton suggested, "and let Sharon and the guides return to the platform where they can remain in safety in the event of the beast's again charging us. We'll see if we can bag the creature for Holton's geographic society, or the Smithsonian Institute."

SHARON and the three guides ascended the grapevine ladder, while Otter and Benton moved through the brush toward the spot where they had observed the towering hulk of the teeheemen sink from sight.

They approached with caution until they could distinguish the great animal's body. At a signal from Benton, the two discharged their rifles together. They had expected to see the great creature rise to its feet, wild with rage. Instead, there was silence, following the reports of their weapons.

"What's got into the old boy?" Otter asked as the two advanced toward the prostrate mountain of flesh.

"The teeheemen is dead!" Benton exclaimed. "The last of his kind is no more!"

"And it's bullets that have done it!" Otter remarked, excitedly. "This old dummy must have hooked up with Holton some place and got away. Holton wounded him so badly that he came this far from the scene where he was shot, and died."

"Or else," Benton said, "the creature may have slain Holton and Duros, and sustained its mortal wounds while so doing."

"I think we ought to try and find the two, then get out of this mess of a country," said Otter.

"We'll do that very thing," Benton agreed. "We'll take a few photographs of this beast with one of the cameras, and then leave our camp and attempt to find Holton. If we take the back trail of the teeheemen, we shall find the place where they encountered the creature, and there we shall either find their crushed bodies or their bones if they were devoured by the teeheemen."

The men returned to the camp tree and announced that the teeheemen was dead. The guides brought the packs from the platform in the tree, and the entire party advanced to the place where the dead teeheemen lay.

Benton took a dozen pictures of the creature at various angles. When he had completed the work, the party followed the back trail of the beast through the jungle.

They arrived at the spot where Holton had mortally wounded the great animal. They noted the broken shrubbery in the vicinity of the tree behind which Holton and Rosalie Sharon had eluded the violent charges of the teeheemen.

"They escaped," Benton announced, picking up a number of the empty shells from the ground, where Holton had ejected them from his rifle while firing at the charging animal.

"Then they must be some place in the jungle, where they have lost their bearings," said Otter.

"Duros knows this valley from beginning to end," reminded Benton. "If he is still with Holton they will be at the camp unless some other evil has befallen them."

"We had better return to the camp, then," Otter suggested, and the party retraced its steps.

[TO BE CONCLUDED]

The Composite Brain

(Continued from page 28)

A moment's silence, then he said: "The brain registers the impression 'very hungry'."

The professor spoke the last words with peculiar emphasis. James shot a sidelong glance at his uncle, and started when he saw the wild light of sheer insanity gleaming in his eyes. . . . The uncle made a move toward him, and James took a step backward. . . . The old scientist stopped and made a horrible grimace, which was intended for a smile but failed of its purpose. He resumed his subject:

"You see what a powerful engine of destruction I have here. With it" (the light of insanity glowed from his cadaverous eyes once more) "I can do anything I will. I am all-powerful, I can kill whom I wish, I can depopulate the earth!"

He shrieked out the last words in a frenzy. Then his manner changed suddenly.

"Come," he said, beckoning with a clawlike finger, "come here. My secret is not safe with you. You belong down there."

He pointed down into the pit. Suddenly he leapt forward and grasped James by the arm. James looked at him dumbly a moment before he fully realized the significance of the movement.

With a scream he tried to break away, but his uncle held him with the rigid grip of a madman, and drew him closer to the pit. Again he screamed and struggled nearly out of the professor's hold. Leroy leapt forward suddenly; there was a short scuffle at the brink, and with another

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horrible scream James pitched forward into the pit.

The two men stepped back. Leroy touched the button that operated the door; the heavy slab slid in place; and the insane scientists smiled at each other as the muffled screams below ceased abruptly.

"Bulldog instincts working," remarked the elder, calmly.

"PROFESSOR," said Leroy after they had once more seated themselves in the laboratory, "don't you think that the addition of a portion of a good human brain to our beast's headpiece would render him more efficient?"

"Yes, I had thought of that, but where can we obtain a live man to get a brain from? The man from whom we obtained the arms was only knocked unconscious, luckily, but occasions like that are rare and that young fool, James, is in shreds by now. What a pity we didn't think of it then!"

"Well, I don't think that fellow was much of an intellectual giant, anyhow; we want the most highly developed brain we can get."

Professor Hurley was silent a moment. Then:

"I know the very brain we want," he said, "and it happens that I have a personal score to settle with this man. You know Dr. Forrester of the university? He was the cause of my removal from the chair of surgery some years ago, and I swore vengeance. It would be my moment of triumph to have him in my power and let him know that I intend to use his brain in an experiment of mine."

"But how shall we lure him here?"

"I have a plan in which we can utilize our tentacled little friend down there in the pit to good advantage."

"Let's hear it."

WITHIN an hour the two madmen had formulated their plans.

The far-off university tower clock faintly tolled the hour of midnight, as in the basement of the laboratory the professor and Leroy finished feeding their hideous ward a generous amount of a nourishing, gruel-like mixture. This done, the professor mentally directed it up the steps and out on the driveway, where their machine waited.

The springs creaked as the misshapen monster clambered in and lay on the floor in the rear of the car. A blanket was flung over it; the two men got in; and the automobile plunged off into the night.

Fifteen minutes later it coasted to a silent halt in front of Dr. Forrester's elm-shaded residence. The professor pointed to an open window near the corner of the house, on the second floor.

"That is where our man sleeps. Now watch our little friend get him."

So saying, he seated himself on the running board and began the task of mentally piloting the creature.

Under his direction it lumbered across the lawn, reached the house and began the long climb up the water spout and vines. Once it sprang into sharp silhouette in a splash of moonlight, only to blend back into the shadows again when the moonlight dimmed, as if to blot out a sight that was unpleasant in the eyes of God.

At last it swung itself to the window-ledge of the doctor's room, and Professor Hurley breathed a sigh of relief as the creature disappeared inside.

"Bulldog instincts will do the rest, though I had better direct it to bite and not to kill, or our brain will not be alive when we get it," he said with a low chuckle.

Dr. Forrester awoke from uneasy

dreams at the gentle shaking of his bed. He rolled over and opened his eyes, then sat bolt upright as his startled eyes fell upon the hideous thing that was slowly creeping over the foot of his bed.

Absolutely paralyzed by terror, unable to make a sound, he sat rigid until a slimy tentacle brushed against his naked forearm. Then he bounded out of bed, still soundless, seized a chair and struck a savage blow at the horror now lying on his bed. The blow rebounded as if he had struck a resilient piece of rubber. Under a shower of blows the beast slid off on to the floor and backed the doctor into a corner, where the still soundless man fought frantically against the foul-smelling, clammy embrace until the paralyzing effect of the poison brought merciful unconsciousness.

SCARCELY had Professor Hurley withdrawn the needle of the hypodermic syringe that administered the antidote, than the mists of oblivion began to lift from the young doctor's brain.

He found himself bound to a post in an underground laboratory, where Leroy and the professor were busily engaged in preparing an operating table. As his eyes swept the room, they fell upon the shapeless mass of the thing. A shudder of horror shook his body as he gazed upon the handiwork of his captors. His observations were interrupted by the voice of the professor, taunting him.

His old enemy came and stood before him, laughed at him, tantalized him, tortured him, showered him with curses as he stormed and raged before his captive. He dwelt on his fancied wrongs, told him how and why he had brought him there, and screamed his vengeance until he fell

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back into his chair exhausted, a suggestion of foam about the corners of his mouth.

During the long silence that ensued, Dr. Forrester looked again at the black-furred huddle in the corner. Something in its absolutely inert appearance fascinated him. He wished that it would make a movement of some kind, rather than sprawl so limply on the floor.

He looked again at the elaborate preparations being made so that his brain might be alive to be put into that frightful thing. The fast-crumbling throne of sanity in his head tottered and nearly fell. Oh! if that beast would only move. If that single tentacle would only move an inch, what a relief it would be! He fairly shrieked it mentally.

To his surprize it did move. A moment later he wished it would open its mouth. It did. Then the swaying throne of reason in his brain became steady, and for the next thirty seconds his brain spun in one of those lightninglike thought processes that sometimes come to men in the face of death.

His eyes glowing, he mentally commanded the thing to flex the arms that hung limply at its sides. They flexed, then, at his order, unflexed. He looked at the operating table. . . . The professor was pouring ether on an anesthetizing cone. . . . He looked back at the thing. . . . It was a desperate chance, but he must take it.

Slowly, and with beads of perspiration standing on his forehead, he urged the creature noiselessly across the floor toward the professor.

As it crouched behind the old man, the captive closed his eyes and directed all his faculties on the mental command of "kill".

There was an instant of scuffling, a piercing shriek, and the doctor opened his eyes to see his enemy borne to the floor by the weight of his attacker.

Somewhere in that bit of grafted bulldog brain had lain dormant the little group of cells that snap when the dog goes mad and attacks his master. This instinct took full possession of the huge body and the results were horrible to see.

The doctor closed his eyes again. When the sounds of the struggle ceased he reopened them and saw the thing sprawling motionless over what had been Professor Hurley.

He glanced at Leroy, who had stood motionless during the grim tragedy.

"Cut these ropes quickly, or I'll send that creature at you!" he commanded.

Like one in a trance, and keeping his eyes steadfastly fixed upon the thing, the student obeyed.

Freed, Dr. Forrester strode across the room, where he halted abruptly at the sight of a wicked automatic lying on the desk. Slowly he picked it up. He shot a sidelong glance at Leroy, still staring dumbly at the repulsive sight before him. He deliberated a moment; would it not be best to erase all evidences of such a travesty of nature? Suddenly he stepped forward and emptied the contents of the gun pointblank into Leroy's body. Without a sound the youth crumpled to the floor, his fast-glazing eyes still fixed upon the thing.

A short search in an adjoining room brought to light a large can of kerosene. Dr. Forrester dashed it over the furniture and shelves, saturated the clothing of the corpses with it, ignited it in several places, locked the door to the underground laboratory, where the thing still lay, and fled from the house.

Many blocks away, on the university hill that overlooked the town, he glanced back and smiled grimly at the ruddy glow in the distance that marked the funeral pyre of so awful a secret. The old building was blazing fiercely.

Adventures of An Astral

(Continued from page 42)

"Yes, it was embalmed so that she could take it to America for burial. She left this morning, on the *Grenadier.*"

I was overcome with joy at hearing this. All was not lost, then! I was not too late!

That moment the telephone rang. The manager took down the receiver. As he listened, his face grew grave.

"What! What ship did you say? The *Grenadier?* But that is terrible!"

Hanging up, he turned an ashen face toward his companion.

"The *Grenadier* was sunk in collision with the *Dartmouth* just after clearing harbor!" he exclaimed. "Only six passengers saved!"

An electric shock thrilled through me. Confused thoughts rattled within my astral brain. When sifted, they resolved themselves into two questions. Is Lucetta living? Is Lucetta dead?

If the latter, we would soon be reunited. But, merciful heavens! Suppose she were one of the saved!

As for my poor body, it had almost undoubtedly gone down with the ship. No one, when the living are endangered, thinks of rescuing corpses.

Leaving the hotel, I sped across the harbor to open sea. I boarded the *Dartmouth* and looked eagerly about.

At first I saw no one I recognized. And then I heard a voice I could have sworn to anywhere. It was my wife's.

She was standing on deck talking with one of the *Dartmouth's* passengers—a tall, handsome young gentleman of about twenty-five. Her eyes were wet with tears.

The young man spoke.

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grieve so much," he said soothingly. "I can't bear seeing you do that. After all, you are very young and beautiful, you know, and must not bury all your hopes for life in your husband's grave."

Lucetta began to cry afresh.

"I know, Mr. Johnston," she sobbed, "but I'm afraid I was unkind to him. If I'd let him do what he wanted to, he wouldn't have gone to Monte Carlo. And now he's dead—and it's my fault!"

Young Johnston took her hands gently in his. How I should have liked to kick the presumptuous cub!

"Why, Mrs. Thompson! I know you could never be unkind!" he replied incredulously.

Lucetta's sobs increased.

"No, but indeed I am, Mr. Johnston," she affirmed. "He wanted to astralize himself—and—and I would not let him!"

A gleam of understanding came into Johnston's eyes. I instinctively knew he had guessed what had happened.

"But, Mrs. Thompson, it's very wrong to astralize one's self. You were not to blame. You were only doing your duty by preventing such an act."

He talked on in that strain for several minutes. He was a glib orator, and presently Lucetta wiped away her tears on a dainty kerchief, and even smiled a little. She took Johnston's arm, and the two moved off down the deck, gaily chatting. I was simply furious, but helpless to interfere.

Deserting the ship, I minutely searched the surface in a desperate hope of finding my body. Not seeing it, I plunged to the bottom and began examining the sunken *Grenadier*.

Locked in a vaultlike safe I found the coffin. The body was well embalmed, but entirely useless. Even an astral cannot open a safe combination. The body was imprisoned there.

Sitting gloomily down on the coffin, I buried my astral face on astral hands, and gave way to despair.

Hearing a burst of astral laughter at my elbow, I looked up.

I saw young Johnston's astral, grinning from ear to ear.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" he laughed sneeringly. "Well, you are in a pretty mess! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

I was too overcome to move.

"Yes," he repeated, "you *are* in a mess and no mistake. Your body down half a mile under water, locked in a burglar-proof safe, and no way of getting it out. Well, my friend, I guess I'll have to look after Lucetta for you. It's evident you're not in condition to do so any longer."

And then the hound laughed again.

I ought to have pulverized him, but I had not yet recovered from the shock of his sudden appearance.

He was a silent a moment, then continued:

"Lucetta will suit me very well. She has oodles of greenbacks, I'm told, and besides, is very pretty."

He paused again, waiting for an answer. Then he went on:

"She's promised to accompany my party on a European tour. You know the old saying about propinquity?"

Then I sprang up and assaulted him. Evading my blows, he fled with a mocking laugh. I pursued, but he reached his stateroom and entered his body before I could seize him.

Reinstated in earthly form, he defiantly shook his fist at the air.

"Not this time, my friend!" he exclaimed. "You weren't quite quick enough."

With a last derisive laugh, he quitted the stateroom and went on deck. I followed, but did not remain long. I could not bear to watch the young cad as he skilfully wormed his way into my wife's favor.

Abandoning the ship, I hurried away to the other side of the globe,

and joining a company of astrals, sought to forget my troubles.

But I could not forget. In imagination, I could see that young puppy holding Lucetta's hands, and murmuring endearments in her ears.

For two weeks I remained with the astral throng, and during that period we penetrated many unknown portions of the universe.

Then the suspense became too terrible to bear, and bidding my astral friends farewell, I hurried to Europe and took up the trail of Lucetta and Johnston. After a short search, I found them in a Florence art gallery.

I noted with disgust that their friendship was rapidly advancing, and that Johnston was undoubtedly winning a high place in Lucetta's regard. Unable to contain myself, I snarled in Johnston's ear:

"You unspeakable cad! I'll pay you out for this!"

Johnston heard me perfectly, for though an astral cannot communicate with a mortal who has never committed the astralizing act, it is simple to convey thoughts to one who has.

His astral jeered back at me: "Ha! Ha! How are you going to do it? You'll have to get your body back first! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

His reply plunged me into the deepest gloom. He had logic on his side. As an astral I was powerless to hinder his nefarious designs. Nor could I appeal to Lucetta, who had no communication with the astral world.

In impotent anger, I dashed from the gallery.

At the end of three months, Lucetta returned to our home in America. She brought with her as guests young Johnston and a number of his friends. Till then, Lucetta, though permitting Johnston certain small liberties, had remained true to my memory. But now I trembled with fear, for I saw

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she was fast weakening. Nor could I justly blame her, for she believed me dead and buried thousands of feet beneath ocean's surface.

Neither would I have entertained such murderous feelings toward Johnston had he shared my wife's belief. Taking into consideration what he knew, however, he was behaving like a malignant fiend. I cheerfully could have throttled him; but alas! I lacked opportunity.

Three days after Lucetta came home, my worst fears were realized. Standing invisible in the air beside them, I saw Johnston slip a flashing diamond on Lucetta's finger.

Uttering a loud curse, I fled from the house.

An hour later, while I was roaming about space, filled with black despair, I again heard Johnston's maddening laugh beside me.

Turning, I saw his astral regarding me with a sneer.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" he taunted. "What did I tell you, my friend? She's mine at last!"

As he spoke, an inspiration struck me.

Without hesitation, I dashed toward Johnston, who dodged aside, expecting me to turn and pursue him.

Instead, I rushed by him at tremendous speed, and darted toward home.

For a moment he stared after me in surprize, believing I could not bear his taunts and was fleeing from them. Then realization of my intentions dawned upon him, and with a startled oath he was after me. But already I had a good lead, and the knowledge that this was my last chance to regain happiness lent me additional strength. Yet Johnston was young and strong, and for some time the issue was uncertain.

He clung close at my heels, and I could not shake him off. Then I saw my home just ahead, and the sight nerved me to a last desperate effort. With Johnston only a few feet behind me, I hurled myself forward through the building into his room, and entered his body.

Stark mad with disappointed rage, his astral danced about the chamber, mouthing threatening curses. Paying him no attention, I left the room and went downstairs. His astral followed.

I went into the drawing room. Lucetta was sitting on the sofa. Seeing me, she sprang up with a cry of delight.

Throwing her arms about my neck, she exclaimed:

"Why! Where have you been all this time, dear? I was so lonesome without you!"

Then she added, half playfully, half in reproach: "This is a pretty way to treat your bride-to-be, sir!"

Her words ran like thunder through my brain. Sure enough! Lucetta had promised to marry Johnston, and she believed I was he! I was engaged to my own wife!

What poetic justice! Nothing could be better. In Johnston's form I could possess Lucetta, and he, miserable fiend, beholding my happiness, would be plunged into a hell of despair.

With a triumphant laugh, I clasped Lucetta to my breast and rained kisses upon her willing rosy lips.

Uttering a yell of misery, Johnston's astral ignominiously fled.

MY TALE is nearly complete. I have never astralized myself again. Perhaps, after all, Lucetta is right about astralizing's being wrong. Besides, suppose I astralized myself, and Johnston's astral should come to earth during my absence. The thought is too awful even to contemplate!

No! No more astralizing for me! I'll remain a satisfied earthbound mortal all the rest of my days!

A Night of Terror with a Mad Dog

The Dane

By SAMUEL M. SARGENT, JR.

LIKE sheets of blinding rain the fine snow had been hurtling across the waste lands all day. The winter of the North had descended with unheard-of ferocity. It shrieked and screamed like a mad demon, and sent the snow and ice piling up in mountain packs. Three feet it lay, rising in a great white tide. The trees dripped ice like waterfalls, and the whole universe was blinding white.

Old Tom kept his grim, weather-hard face steadily ahead, with never a glance in my direction. In his eyes was the look of one who sees death a step before him. I realized that he was lost, he who knew the whole North. The knowledge brought a chill touch like death's fingers, but I only compressed my lips in a thin line and staggered on by his side.

It was a terrible cold, cutting through our clothing like a red-hot knife. My legs were becoming numb, and my fingers crackled. The world was assuming a stranger look, a dim, blurred look. Sight was leaving me, and finally a brief blot of space passed over me like a film.

There was warmth, a fire roaring. I opened my eyes and gazed around. I was sitting in a chair in the room of a cabin—a cabin that held a strange, subtle gloom that suggested mystery and hideousness. There were two other men in the room, Old Tom, and—I turned my eyes on the owner of this haven of ours. There I saw hideousness, and at the sight I shrank inwardly.

He was a little man, well-proportioned, wiry. His face was like death

50-50

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itself, and worse than death. It was a cinder that had gone through superheated flame. It was a volcanic rock, seamed and scarred. It was an old corpse that had been slashed into ribbons. That was it: a criss-cross of scars, a thing blighted with old cuts and healed lacerations. The eyes were stark and mute.

I gazed over at Old Tom's lined face, and read dread there. Then I knew. It was Scarred Rondell who was our host: Rondell, the recluse, whose cabin not the stoutest trapper or woodsman would approach. He was known as a strange man, and wild tales were told of his cabin here in the wilderness, and of a phantom beast that howled when the moon was wan.

"Comin' 'round, boy?" asked Tom, and his voice was thin and trembly. "Ye looked like death when we got hyar. Our lives is both owin' to Mr. —Mr. Rondell."

The old man with the horrible face looked over at me, and shifted his pipe slowly.

" 'Twas nothing," he said in a voice that was low and solemn. "I heard you calling, and merely opened the door."

He gazed into the hot fire, and, as he gazed, his face assumed a gray, ashen look.

" 'Tis a terrible night out!"

He lapsed into silence, and Tom and I sat tensed at the sound of his voice, hollow with fear and horror. Suddenly he lifted his hand.

"Hark!" he said. "What was that whimpering?"

His eyes turned on me, and they were very old and tired. In them sat the terror of years.

"No," he resumed, "it is the wind; the wind howling just as it did that night twenty years ago—a night just like this!"

There was a longer silence now, during which Tom and I sat stiff and alert. There was look of misgiving in my friend's eyes turned on me, and I looked back with the same expression. As for Scarred Rondell, he still gazed at the fire, and he seemed to be trembling a little. Then abruptly he started speaking.

"It was a night like this, twenty years ago, that I ceased to live, my friends."

His eyes were bent on me, and his scars were chalk-white.

"I will tell you of that night, and where this hell-mask of a face came from!"

He laughed madly.

"Oh, there are wild stories out! There are wild, strange stories told! No man would come to my shelter, except when driven by a storm like this! You two both fear me! You are both trembling! But, my friends, I am just a man like you, or I was, until that blizzard came. It has been twenty years since I have harbored a guest, and I am mad to unburden my soul! You are my first audience, and perhaps my last!

"Two decades ago," said the old man, "I came into this bitter North Country. I came seeking gold; I stayed to trap. It was an unknown land then, and there were no trails for forty miles around. I brought only a horse, and my dog, Devil. He was a Great Dane, and came nearly to my waist, and he was as strong as a bear. I remember the time he dragged me out of the Stakon River at flood.

"Have you ever seen that river? The Indians call it Devil Water. It swirls through a lean canyon, and thunders for a hundred miles over great boulders, and—yes, at flood it tears some of the bigger stones up bodily, and carries them for miles. I

was caught in that river when the current seemed like great hands wrenching me in two. And I was going down for the third time when Devil saw me. I'll never forget how that magnificent brute plunged headlong in, how he actually shoved the water away, and dragged me out. That was where he got his name. The Indians called him Devil God after that, and I shortened it to Devil."

He broke off.

"What was that?" he asked. "That sound outside?"

"Just ice rattling," I returned.

But for a minute we all three stared toward the black glass, at the specter snow passing. Then Rondell continued.

"Well, it was three years I lived here, trapping. Then came one winter that was all ice and blizzard. There were times I couldn't move outside, it was so cold, and the snow so heavy against the door. It was a cold that snapped trees in two like matches, and when the wolves howled a while, and died off. Then came a week, a solid week of it, and the snow was six feet deep.

"In the middle of that week came a night that was just like this, and it was the night I ceased to live. I had a big fire blazing, and Devil and I were alone, and I was sitting in a chair, smoking, and sort of dozing. It was cheerful with the logs crackling, and the storm screaming like sin outside, and the ice rattling on the roof. Devil was comfortable, too, lying close up to the fire, gazing at the flames, and thinking, I suppose, and in between times sleeping.

"Well, I had been sitting there that way, smoking, for some time, when I dozed clear off, with my pipe in my mouth. I woke with a start, tense. There was something wrong. Something was whispering a warning to me that made the cold start up my

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back. Everything, apparently, was the same. The door was barred, the fire was crackling away, and outside the storm was keeping up its steady pace. But there was something stark and awful in that room, something wrong, dead wrong! I could feel it like a touch on the shoulder. I hadn't moved. I had just opened my eyes. I looked around, after a moment, into each semi-dark corner, at the black windowpane, and at the door. But I could see nothing out of place. Still dread was there, intrudent, outstanding.

"I glanced at the dog to see if he had noticed, too. The eye nearest me was open, and he seemed to be listening. But there was no untoward sound, no movement anywhere. I dismissed the apprehension as the product of a spooky night. I leaned my head back again, and puffed at my pipe. But all the time that feeling was present, that intuition of something terrible near. It was the feeling of something watching, something looking fixedly at me. It was like ice up my back.

"I shifted my pipe, and as I made the move I fancied hearing a low sound like a whimper. It made my hair stand up. I looked around the room again, fearfully, carefully. There was nothing, apparently, near me. But steadily the feeling grew, until I was thoroughly alarmed, thoroughly frightened. I looked down at Devil again. He seemed to be sleeping. I was about to call to him, to pat him, when suddenly his eye flew open. It was looking straight at me, and it seemed to hold a queer light in it. Something about its look sent a chill through me for a minute. Its gaze was so steady and strange, unlike a dog's, I thought. But I dismissed the fancy with a shrug. The solitude was getting me. Still I did not speak to the dog, nor stroke him. Something made me stop, some feeling.

"I puffed at my pipe, and turned my mind toward other things, but that intuition of danger persisted. My sleepy contentment was completely gone, and I was on the alert, deadlily on the alert. I kept my eyes constantly upon the door, and upon the window with its black, white-flecked pane. But the danger did not seem to come from that quarter. It seemed nearer, very near me, near the fireplace. It seemed almost as if some stark gnome of fear were standing by me. As the fear grew, and I became aware that it was no fancy, but a wild reality, I began to tremble in spite of myself. I tried to shake off the feeling, for what earthly things could have come through a night that raged like that one? What living form could ever have survived such a blizzard? But it was there, a something, living or not! It was there, hideous and unseen! It was by my chair like a grinning Horla.

"There came a slight movement, so slight I could not tell where, and again I detected what seemed to be an eery whimper. My blood was like ice. I wanted to scream, to leap up, to run. But I was frozen to the chair with an unearthly terror. I glanced down again at the dog, and its eye was staring at me, unblinking. I shudder even now as I remember the look in that eye. It was horrible, hellish. After a moment the eye closed."

SCARRED BONDELL paused. His face was gray as he relived the story.

"What was that?" he whispered. "What was that sound?"

There was a silence, and then he went on.

"So I sat there, my mind awhirl. The eye reopened. It was wide and staring. It had the look of a fiend in it. I was trembling so that I could

scarcely hold my pipe between my lips. And I dared not raise my hand. We stayed there that way God knows how long, and the eye never blinked. It had grown tinged with red, and in it some mental struggle seemed reflected. The dog didn't move from his position once, but every few minutes that great, heavy body quivered horribly, and once I heard him whine. It was a plaintive sound, the old love note with a rising, mastering intonation of savagery, of madness. The eye never wavered. I could have screamed as I saw the look in it grow. I wanted to leap up and flee, but I felt that one move was death. I thought of my gun, but it was in the corner near the brute. So we stayed there, while the long hours edged past, too crippled to crawl. My pipe was slipping. I tried to clench my teeth and hold it, but I was trembling too much.

"I heard that low whimper again. It had a horrible note, like the sound of a mad man gibbering. The brute quivered again, and the eye slowly closed, and opened. My pipe was hanging, ready to fall. I half lifted my hand. The monster whined, and now the sound was deeper, more like a snarl. The mad eye flamed steadily like an evil light. Then, after hideous eons, came the end. My pipe fell, and in that instant, with a roar the mad dog sprang, his jaws slavering froth. I went down with my hands on my throat, and I felt the fangs on my fingers. God! Those fangs! They ripped my face to a spangle of ribbons!

"Well, I killed him at last, after he had killed me—torn away my very identity! That's all, my friends! Except that sometimes, when the night is raw, I'll hear him calling his loneliness, and once in a while I see him far off against the snow.

"Hark! What was that? Was it a dog howling?"

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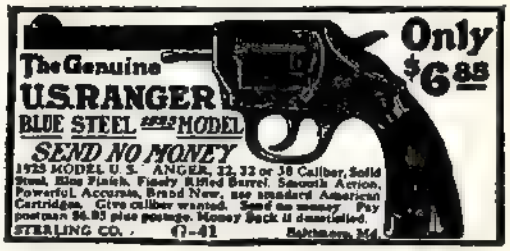

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The Better Choice

(Continued from page 24)

an enemy. Merciless, showing no quarter, he crushed his victims with as little compunction as a thoughtless boy smashes a tiny ant.

Now the tables were turned. Now he was the fly, his enemies the spiders who lay in the far corner of the web they had spun for him, waiting until he became enmashed in their toils. Not a single stone was left unturned; his failure was as sure as the sound of Gabriel's horn. And he knew that Montague White was behind it all. An insane demoniac light glittered in his bloodshot eyes.

He opened his desk drawer, and the bright barrel of a thirty-two gleamed in the sunlight. He snapped open the chambers and looked them through, all the while fondling the weapon as if it were a child, talking to it in low, soothing tones. He loaded the revolver and dropped it into the pocket of his coat. Then, donning his hat, he set out upon his appointed mission—to find White and beg enough from him to insure his rehabilitation. Failing in that—he shrugged his shoulders and his hand sought the weapon in his pocket.

He found Montague White in his office, alone. The interview was brief and decisive. The sound of the shot brought a hundred people to the scene, and they found the half-crazed man standing above the body of his victim, the smoking revolver still in his hand. Strong arms gripped him from behind; firm hands took the smoldering weapon from his grasp.

In the solitude of the lone, dreary cell, the brainstorm passed, and to John Castle came realization of the enormity of his crime.

He clenched his fists until his nails bit deep into the flesh. His brow was furrowed with a thousand wrinkles and the veins stood out in bold relief against his white, set face.

He thought of his son, now grown to young manhood. How proud he was of the boy, his first born. "A true son of his father," everyone had said. He had pictured a wonderful future for the lad. Now. . . .

His daughter was one of the season's most popular débutantes. The eligible males in her set were fairly falling over each other in their frantic endeavors to find favor in her eyes. But now he had killed. . . .

He shuddered at the thought, and covered his eyes with his hand; as if by so doing he might shut out the ever recurring vision of his victim.

His wife, the woman who had borne and cared for his children; the woman he loved with all his heart and with all his soul! Now by this one rash deed he had stolen everything from her—home, happiness, reputation—all must go because Montague White was dead, and his own hands had done the killing!

Would to God that it were his own body that lay cold and stark instead of his former partner's! Would that he had died twenty years before, when he could have left behind him a spotless name!

Again his dream of years before came back to him with startling vividness. Perhaps it had not been all a dream. If only he could have looked ahead, how willing he would have been to die!

But he had *not* died. Instead he had lived on, each day weaving the chain of circumstances more tightly about him—and now he was here, behind prison bars, a murderer!

All night long John Castle paced the narrow confines of his cell. All

night long his tortured mind revolted at the horror, the gruesome reality of it all. At last, worn out with the strain of the ordeal, just as the first rays of the morning sun peeped over the hilltops—the sun whose light was never seen inside the prison's cold, gray walls—he flung himself in sheer exhaustion upon his cot, and dropped off into fitful slumber.

The next few days were fraught with untold agony for John Castle. A hundred times a day he prayed that death might come and release him from his sufferings. But the law—cold, hard, unrelenting—took care that he should live until he had paid in full for the deed he had done, live to expiate his crime.

At last came the trial. The jury made short work of the case. John Castle was not at all surprized at their verdict. There was nothing else they could have decided: "Guilty of murder in the first degree."

He drew himself erect as the old judge pronounced sentence. At least no one could accuse him of not meeting the situation like a man.

". . . . hanged by the neck until he is dead."

There was a calendar on the wall of his cell. John Castle ringed the date which the law had set for his execution. As each day dragged by he checked it off upon the calendar, and prayed that the time would pass more swiftly. The nearest he came to breaking down was on the eve of his death, when his wife came to bid him a final farewell.

The next morning, his last on earth, a young priest came and asked a blessing for his sin-steeped soul. Then attendants led him on his last walk, through the narrow corridor lined with cells, out into the morning, out to where the scaffolding reared ghastly and forbidding against the gray walls of the prison. The sun had not

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risen nor would John Castle see it rise, for with its first beams his life would be snuffed out like a candle.

He walked boldly upright to his place on the platform of death. He marveled at his inward calm as they fitted the black hood over his head and shut out forever the world about him. He felt the weight of the hempen collar as they placed it about his neck; then—waited!

In that last long moment his mind reverted to his weird dream—or was it a dream? He had figured it all out in the loneliness of his cell. It was twenty years to a day! He wondered if the ethereal stranger would be there to meet him and guide him to the seat of judgment. . . . He would not have long to wait before he knew!

The flooring gave way beneath him. His body dropped . . . a sudden, terrific jolt . . . then oblivion!

4

The blinding effulgence again became a whirling, chaotic jumble. Gradually it diminished, until it was but a tiny revolving point. Then it was gone altogether, leaving intense, impenetrable blackness.

"Come, John," the voice was saying, "the time grows short. Already upon the earth the stars have waned and the sun is starting its daily journey. You have seen what the future holds in store, should you choose to return to the life you have left behind. I repeat, there is no place here for the soul that is not content. The decision is yours."

John Castle could not repress an involuntary shudder at the thought of what he had just witnessed. After all, perhaps man was not the best judge of his own destiny!

As he hesitated, the ethereal figure of his guide faded out before his eyes. An invisible force gripped him, propelled him at breath-taking speed toward the earth. He wondered what could exert such a tremendous power. The answer came in a flash. It was morning. They had found his body. White was manipulating the machine!

It seemed hours, yet he knew it could have been but a mere minute before his astral body once more hovered above his inert physical one. His guess had been correct—White was at the machine. He could see his letter of instructions on the table beside the empty jars that had contained the last of his life-giving mixture. His wife and children were there, too, their tear-stained faces watching with prayerful intentness. His comprehensive survey glimpsed the family physician eying the proceedings with a supercilious sneer. He felt the magnetic, irresistible power of his invention drawing his soul back into his body. How wonderful it would be! To die—and then to live again!

Once more came that vision of the scaffold. Once more came memories of long hours fraught with misery, spent behind prison bars. . . .

The watchers in the little room saw John Castle's eyelids twitch feebly. A hand moved. They stared, spellbound, as it described an arc toward his head.

White sprang forward with a sharp cry as the hand closed over the three rubber tubes that connected the man and the machine. Too late! One wrench, with a strength that seemed inconsistent with the wan figure on the bed, and the damage was done. John Castle had made his choice!

As he drifted once more into unconsciousness, he could faintly hear Montague White's hoarse cry of horror:

"Good God! Mrs. Castle! He's broken the machine!"

Seven Men in a Tank

By JOHN H. GREEN

"HELLO, Sheriff—Warner of Arko Pipe Line Company, speaking. Want you to come out to our tank farm at once. Found seven bodies when we cleaned out one of our big storage tanks today. Bring the coroner with you."

Four years as sheriff in one of the toughest oil fields the country has ever seen will harden a man to almost anything. I hung up the receiver and turned to one of my deputies.

"Look after the office till I get back, Bob. Found a bunch of stiffs in a tank at Smackover. Reckon I've got to go."

I climbed into my old flivver and started out to hunt up Doc Smith. He had been called to the south part of the field, so, leaving word for him to follow, I drove out from the county seat and headed toward Smackover.

The Arko Tank farm was just on the edge of the field. Twenty big, black steel tanks squatted in accurately spaced rows. Each held fifty-five thousand barrels of crude. They were used to store this oil until it could be pumped to the refineries at Shreveport and New Orleans. Two corrugated iron engine houses and a small field office completed the equipment.

Warner met me as I drove up. He was timekeeper for the Arko and was temporarily in charge until the superintendent returned from Shreveport.

"Come over to the west engine house," he said, leading the way. "We had to move them. Seven men, and not a mark of violence on a one. No papers or means of identification, not even a pocket knife. It looks like robbery, but how in tarnation did they get in that tank in that shape? When?

Announcement

the April Number of

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By NICTZIN DYALHIS

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What for? It's got me beat. It's uncanny, man, I tell you it is."

WE ARRIVED at the engine house. There were seven forms laid out on the concrete floor, a large sheet of canvas covering them all.

"No," I told Warner as he started to draw back the canvas. "Wait until the coroner comes. I don't want to see them now."

"Well, let's look at the tank, then," he replied, eying me curiously.

I agreed, and we walked out to the tank where the bodies were found. It did not differ from the others except that it was on the outside edge of the group. Still this huge mass of steel gave one the impression of a great, black reptile or prehistoric monster. Silent, impressive, but evil. I tried to shake off this moodiness as I followed the timekeeper up the light but serviceable steps leading to the top.

"She has been full of crude for the last ten months," he informed me. "Just got it emptied yesterday."

Down below were a crew of sweating, swearing men at work scraping the bottom and sides of the paraffin residue and basic sediment. This latter was a mixture of oil, salt water, sulfur and mud.

"We found them just before I 'phoned you—all seven in a kind of a heap under the manhole. How did they get here? When? No telling, for crude preserves just like alcohol."

"Let's go back and see if the coroner has come," I suggested. The coroner arrived just as we reached the office—a nervous little man but a good doctor.

Dr. Smith made a hurried examination, and then a more detailed one.

Two days later he was no nearer the solution than he had been at first.

"Not a scratch on them," he sputtered. "No dope or poison reaction. They must have gotten drunk and fallen in there. One thing, sheriff, it gets on my nerves: look at the features of each of those men. I never saw fear portrayed so strongly all my life. I don't understand it."

"Neither do I," I told him. "I think it is hopeless. We have scoured the country—every oil camp, barrel house, rooming house, dance hall. Of course I don't expect an open confession, but there's not even a trace. No one knew the men were missing."

"I guess we shall have to give it up, sheriff," the coroner told me a week later. "It will always be one of the old field's unsolved mysteries."

IT HAS been six months since the finding of the bodies. I have been re-elected sheriff for my third term. I stand high over the whole state as an officer of the law. No one remembers the seven bodies in the tank.

I was strong. I gloried in my will power and self-control. I was sure that time would efface those horrible, haunting, oil-soaked, fear-stricken faces from my memory. It has only made them clearer. When I am awake the memory never leaves me. Asleep, the seven forms flit incessantly through my dreams. Ten thousand times have the scenes of that night come before me! I was on my way home. I accidentally came across seven men playing poker in an abandoned shack—all boys and young men. Not the hardened gamblers, hijackers or vultures of the oil fields, but working boys enjoying themselves after pay day.

I had the law back of me and received a commission on the fines I collected. Here was some extra change. I arrested the whole bunch—not a hard procedure, for they were only working boys. Not being able to take them to town with me, I looked around for some place that would do for a jail. A new, fifty-five thousand barrel tank—just the thing! It wouldn't be used for some time, and I should be back tomorrow. I marched them to the top and searched

them all, taking everything that could be of use to them in any way. Then I ordered them down through the manhole.

"The ladder don't reach the floor," the first one exclaimed.

"Drop!" I yelled. "And make it snappy."

The next day I returned, only to learn that a tremendous well had been brought in, the night before, and turned into this tank.

"Oh, well," I reflected; "those boys got out all right. What's the use of worrying? They won't show up to answer those gambling charges."

So I forgot the incident until Warner called me that day. Why was I so cool? I was certain that nobody would suspect me. Then, as I said in the beginning, oil field life had hardened me to almost anything. But now—last night I saw them, standing in a sea of rapidly rising oil, choking and going under, one by one overcome by gas fumes before actually drowning in the heavy black oil. God! what a sight! Indescribable hate, terror and fear!

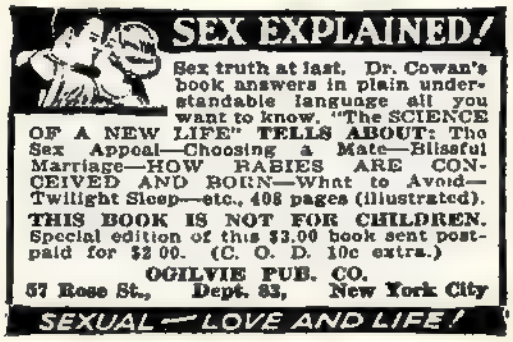
Today I received a letter from a widow in Kansas. Her only son has been missing for a year and a half. The description fitted one of those seven silent forms.

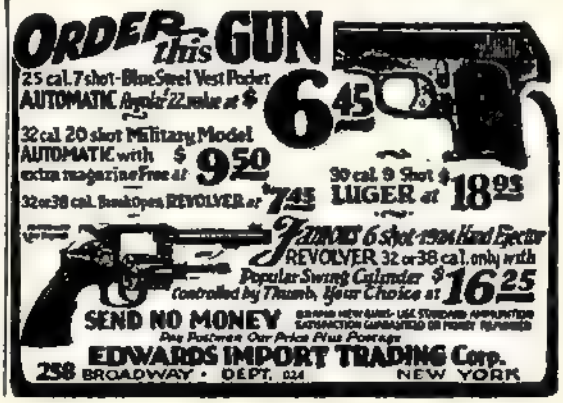
Omar Khayyam was right: Hell is the reflection of a soul on fire. Bill Hickman is a respected man. Nobody suspects the sheriff.

God! those faces! They get clearer—want to drag me down—down—with—with—th—."

THE deputy was startled by a report. He ran into the office to find the body of the sheriff sprawled over the table, a smoking automatic in his hand and a bullet hole through his temple.

Before him lay half a dozen sheets of paper that revealed the mystery of the seven men in the tank.





The Death Bottle

(Continued from page 38)

racked countenance with terrible vividness.

One night toward the end of February, a blizzard more furious than any of the winter roared over the Shumagin Islands. Towering breakers thundered upon the ocean-exposed shores of Popoff and Nagai in a mighty cannonade, while the icy blasts whip-cracked down the mountainsides in crashing barrages of snow and sleet. Gusty drafts swept through the dark house, swaying the heavy window draperies uncannily, until Black Sigurd was driven to seek his father's room, which was on the sheltered side.

Crouching there in the gathering darkness, the broken man suddenly felt that he was not alone. His eyes went swiftly to the high oaken bed at the opposite side of the room, and instantly he sprang to his feet.

Sitting upon the bed was his own father! The old man's little table was before him, and on it was the death bottle. As Black Sigurd stood frozen, the old man uncorked the bottle, put three tablespoonfuls of the liquid into a glass of water, and drank. Then he took off his slippers and crept into his blankets.

Black Sigurd continued to stand, paralyzed in the grip of that frightful hallucination. It had become pitchy dark outside, but the room remained hideously bright. Soon the old man began to rumple his blankets, and turning over on his face, he pressed his hands hard against his stomach. Twisting from side to side, he began to utter deep groans, which came clearly to Black Sigurd's ears above the howling of the blizzard outside.

For a long minute, the dying man's spasmodic contortions continued, while his anguished groans grew sharper and more stertorous. With a barking rattle in his chest, he slowly rose up in his bed and cast upon his son a terrible look of reproach and agony; then his death gurgle was drowned in a freshened shrieking of the gale without, and he fell flat upon his face, with his hands reaching far out and clutching at the bed sheets.

With a maniacal scream of frenzy, Black Sigurd rushed from the house, out into the darkness and storm. Half-running, half-sliding, he hurtled himself through the wind and sleet to the door of the natives' bunkhouse, down near the wharf. Rousing the Aleuts, he ordered them aboard the *Eider*. Terrified at his ghastly countenance and his glittering eyes, the natives dared not refuse.

Aboard the schooner, they set a reefed stump of a mainsail, then cut away the frozen mooring lines with an ax; whereupon the *Eider* scudded out of the harbor before the screaming gale. Threading his way among the islands in the stormy blackness and blinding snow squalls, Black Sigurd at last felt the long, mountain-high swell of the Pacific under him, and he knew that he was clear of the land.

Across eight hundred miles of storm-swept ocean Sigurd Knudsen drove the *Eider* to Valdez, the seat of the criminal court of the Alaskan Peninsula. Sailing the schooner fairly alongside a wharf, he sprang ashore and strode through the snow-drifted village streets up to the territorial court-house. Straight into the marshal's office he walked, in his wet and frozen sea-gear.

"I murdered my father!" were his first words to Brenneman, the marshal.

Then, with a pair of handcuffs on his wrists, he recounted unsparingly all the details of his crime.

THE trial of Black Sigurd was very prompt and very brief. On his own confession, he was found guilty of the murder of his father. He was sentenced to be hanged.

Sigurd Knudsen heard the pronouncement of his sentence with something akin to relief.

"Today," he said. "Now!"

The courts of northwestern Alaska do not adhere very closely to the conventional modes of judicial procedure; and after a short deliberation of the bench, the convicted man's request was granted.

Fifteen minutes after the gallows-cord had been pulled, a power-boat chugged swiftly into the harbor. It had hardly made a landing before Chortka appeared running at top speed through the deserted streets of the village.

When he reached the weather-stained court-house—saw the dispersing fur-coated crowd, the snow-strewn gallows, and the limp body hanging there—he threw himself down upon the snow and wept.

"Sigurd no kill his father!" he sobbed, when the marshal came and lifted him up.

Instantly, the amazed spectators crowded around to hear.

"I too afraid to tell him—the night from Seward—I see him in the pantry—with the medicine bottle—and the white wolf-poison. By and by—when Sigurd drunk—I find the bottle under his pillow. I empty it—and wash it out clean—and—and put in it only pure water!"

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